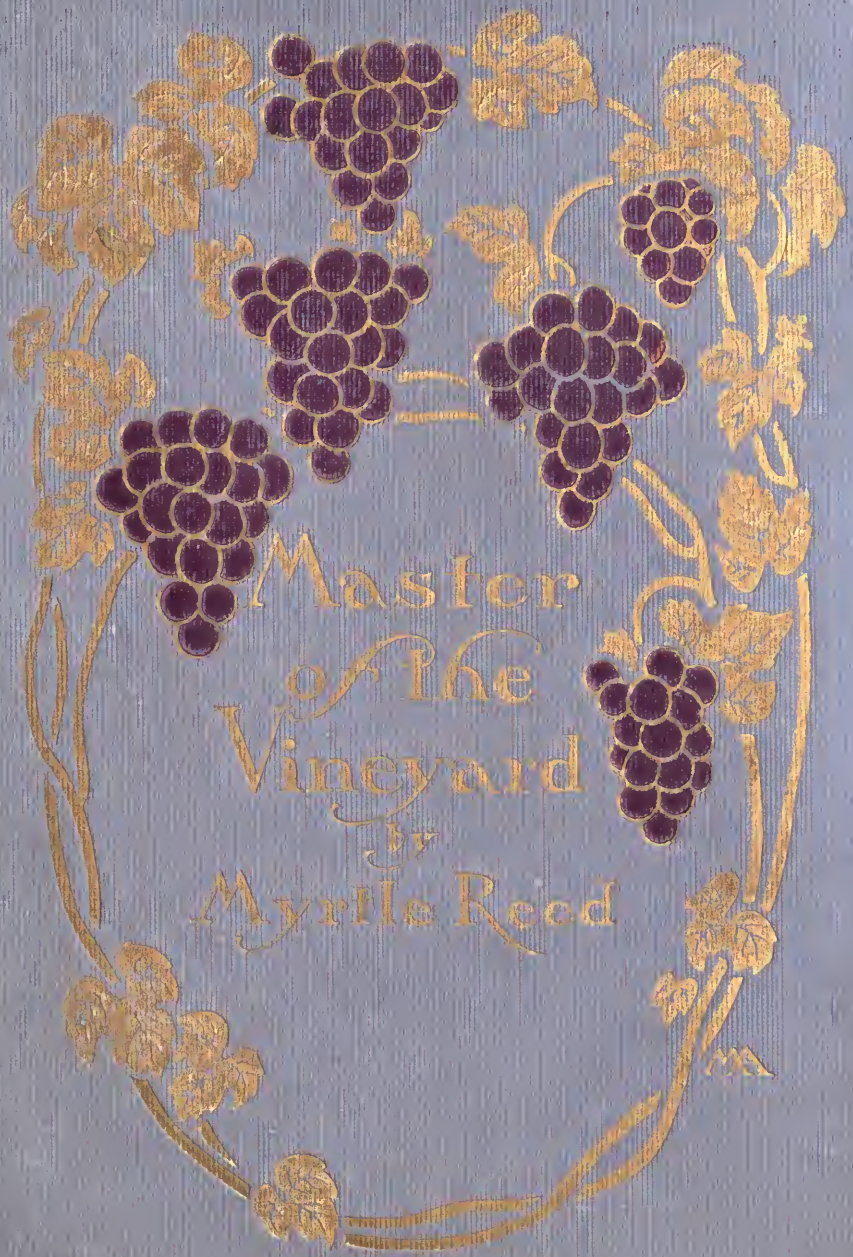
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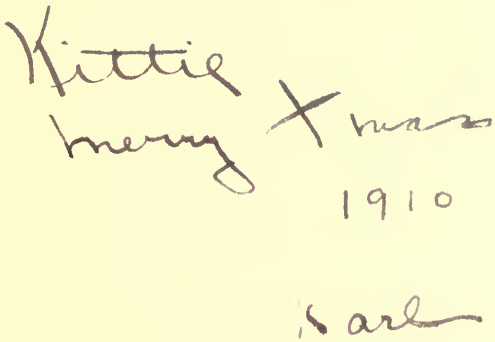
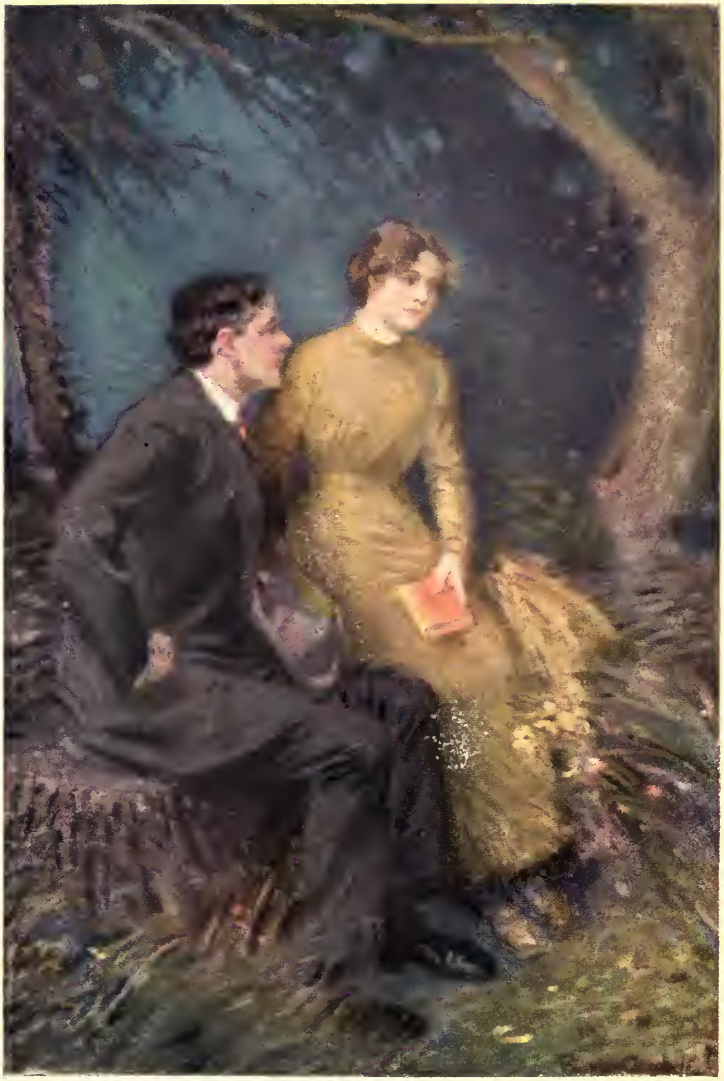
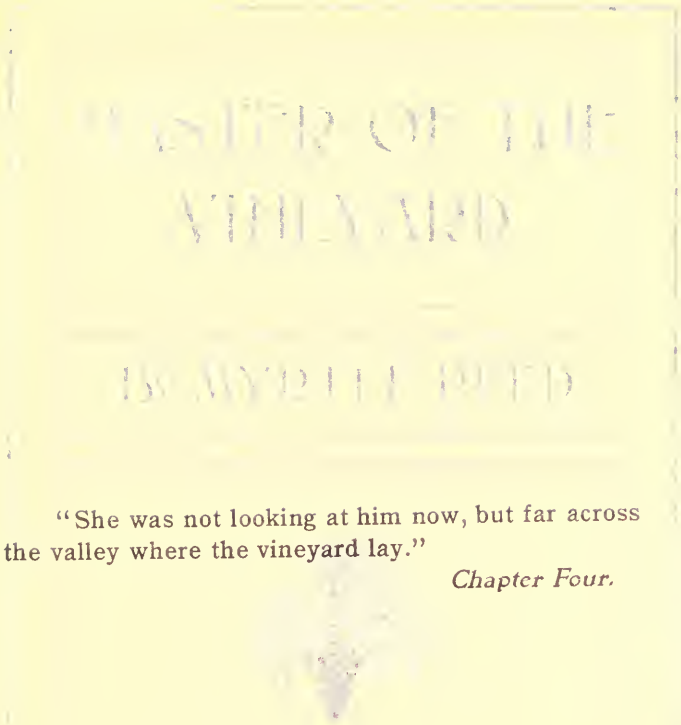

Kittie
Henry Thomas
1910
Sarah

BY MYRTLE REED

LOVE LETTERS OF A MUSICIAN
LATER LOVE LETTERS OF A MUSICIAN
THE SPINSTER BOOK
LAVENDER AND OLD LACE
PICKABACK SONGS
THE SHADOW OF VICTORY
THE MASTER'S VIOLIN
THE BOOK OF CLEVER BEASTS
AT THE SIGN OF THE JACK-O'-LANTERN
A SPINNER IN THE SUN
LOVE AFFAIRS OF LITERARY MEN
FLOWER OF THE DUSK
OLD ROSE AND SILVER
SONNETS TO A LOVER
MASTER OF THE VINEYARD





"She was not looking at him now, but far across the valley where the vineyard lay."

Chapter Four.

From the painting by Blendon Campbell

From the painting by Blendon Campbell

MASTER OF THE VINEYARD

By MYRTLE REED

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
New York and London
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1910

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To

All Who Have Loved in Vain

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Master of the Vineyard

The Valley

touched the sharp edges, here and there to a faint iridescence. "The river-god dreams of rainbows," thought Rosemary, with a smile.

Only one house was near the river; the others were set farther back. The one upon the shore was the oldest and largest house in the valley, severely simple in line and with a certain air of stateliness. The broad, Colonial porch looked out upon the river and the hills beyond it, while all around, upon the southern slope between the opposite hills and the valley, were the great vineyards of the Marshs', that had descended from father to son during the century that had elapsed since the house was built.

The gnarled and twisted vines scarcely showed now, upon the grey-brown background of the soil, but in a few places, where the snow had not yet melted, the tangled black threads were visible. Like the frame surrounding a tapestry, great pines bordered the vineyard save on the side nearest the valley, for the first of the Marshs, who had planted the vineyard and built the house, had taken care to protect his vines from the north-east storms.

The clanging notes of a bell, mellowed by distance, came faintly from the valley below. Rosemary took out the thin, old watch that had been her mother's and her mother's mother's before her, and set the hands at four upon the

pale gold dial. Then she drew up the worn gold chain that hung around her neck, under her gown, and, with the key that dangled from it, wound the watch. In an hour or so, probably, it would stop, but it was pleasant to hear the cheerful little tick while she waited.

The doors of the white schoolhouse in the valley burst open and the tide of exuberant youth rushed forth. Like so many ants, the children swarmed and scattered, their shrill voices sounding afar. Rosemary went to a hollow tree, took out a small wooden box, opened it, and unwound carefully a wide ribbon of flaming scarlet, a yard or more in length. Digging her heels into the soft earth, she went down to the lowest of the group of birches, on the side of the hill that overlooked the valley, and tied the ribbon to a drooping bough. Then she went back to the top of the hill, where a huge log, rolled against two trees, made a comfortable seat for two people.

Five minutes of the allotted twenty had passed since Rosemary had set her watch. At twenty minutes past four, or, at the most, twenty-five, he would come. For three years and more he had never failed to answer the signal, nor, indeed, to look for it when he brushed the chalk from his clothes and locked the door of the schoolhouse behind him.

A kindly wind, in passing, took the ribbon and made merry with it. In and out among

World of Romance

the bare boughs of the birches it fluttered like a living thing, and Rosemary laughed aloud, as she had not done for many days. The hill, the scarlet signal, and the man who was coming symbolised, to her, the mysterious world of Romance.

Sometimes the birches were shy dryads, fleeing before the wrath of some unknown god. At other times, they were the Muses, for, as it happened, there were nine in the group and no others upon the hill. The vineyard across the valley was a tapestry, where, from earliest Spring until the grapes were gathered colour and light were caught and imprisoned within the web. At the bend in the river, where the rushes grew thickly, the river-god kept his harp, which answered with shy, musical murmurings to every vagrant wind.

Again, the hill was a tower, and she a captive princess, who had refused to marry except for love, and Love tarried strangely upon the way. Or, sometimes, she was the Elaine of an unknown Launcelot, safely guarding his shield. She placed in the woods all the dear people of the books, held forever between the covers and bound to the printed page, wondering if they, too, did not long for freedom.

The path up the hill wound in and out among the trees, and so it happened that Rosemary heard muffled footsteps before she saw him coming. A wayfaring squirrel, the first of his

family to venture out, scampered madly up a tree and looked down upon the girl with questioning, fearful eyes. She rose from the log and looked up, with her hands outstretched in unconscious pleading.

He Comes

"Oh," she murmured, "don't be afraid of me!"

"I 'm not," answered a man's voice. "I assure you I 'm not."

"I was n't speaking to you," she laughed, as she went to meet him.

"No?" he queried, flushed and breathless from the climb. "I wonder if there is anyone else for whom you wave red ribbons from your fortress!"

"Take it down, will you please?"

"Wait until I get three full breaths—then I will."

She went back to the log while he awkwardly untied the ribbon, rolled it up, in clumsy masculine fashion, and restored it to the wooden box in the hollow tree. "Are n't you cold?" he asked, as he sat down beside her.

"No—I 'm too vividly alive to be cold, ever."

"But what 's the use of being alive unless you can live?" he inquired, discontentedly.

She sighed and turned her face away. The colour vanished from her cheeks, the youth from her figure. Pensively, she gazed across the valley to the vineyard, where the black,

Rosemary

knotted vines were blurred against the soil in the fast-gathering twilight. His eyes followed hers.

"I hate them," he said, passionately. "I wish I 'd never seen a grape!"

"Were the children bad to-day?" she asked, irrelevantly.

"Of course. Are n't they always bad? What 's the use of caging up fifty little imps and making 'em learn the multiplication table when they don't even aspire to the alphabet? Why should I have to teach 'em to read and write when they 're determined not to learn? Why do I have to grow grapes when it would be the greatest joy of my life to know that I 'd never have to see, touch, taste, or even smell another grape in this world or the next?"

She turned toward him. A late Winter sunset shimmered in the west like some pale, transparent cloth of gold hung from the walls of heaven, but the kindly light lent no beauty to her face. Rosemary's eyes were grey and lustreless, her hair ashen, and almost without colour. Her features were irregular and her skin dull and lifeless. She had not even the indefinable freshness that is the divine right of youth. Her mouth drooped wistfully at the corners, and even the half-discouraged dimple in her chin looked like a dent or a scar.

The bare hands that lay listlessly in her lap were rough and red from much uncongenial

Their Moods

toil. He looked at her for a moment, still absorbed in himself, then, as he noted the pathos in every line of her face and figure, the expression of his face subtly changed. His hand closed quickly over hers.

"Forgive me, Rosemary—I 'm a brute. I have no right to inflict my moods upon you."

"Why not? Don't I bring mine to you?"

"Sometimes—not often."

"Let 's get them out where we can look them over," she suggested, practically. "What do you hate most?"

"Grapes," he replied, readily, "and then children who are n't interested in the alphabet. All day I 've been saying: 'See the cat. Can the cat run? Yes, the cat can run.' Of course they could repeat it after me, but they could n't connect it in any way with the printed page. I sympathised strongly with an unwashed child of philosophical German lineage who inquired, earnestly: 'Teacher, what 's the good of dat?' "

"What else do you hate?"

"Being tied up. Set down in one little corner of the world and being obliged to stay in it. I know to a certainty just what 's going to happen to-morrow and next day and the day after that. Point out any day on the calendar, months ahead, and I can tell you just what I 'll be doing. Nothing is uncertain but the weather."

His Looks

"Some people pray for anchorage," she said.

"I never have," he flashed back. "I want the open sea—tide and tempest and grey surges, with the wind in my face and the thrill of danger in my heart! I want my blood to race through my body; I want to be hungry, cold, despairing, afraid—everything! God, how I want to live!"

He paced back and forth restlessly, his hands in his pockets. Rosemary watched him, half afraid, though his mood was far from strange to her. He was taller than the average man, clean-shaven, and superbly built, with every muscle ready and even eager for use. His thirty years sat lightly upon him, though his dark hair was already slightly grey at the temples, for his great brown eyes were boyish and always would be. In the half-light, his clean-cut profile was outlined against the sky, and his mouth trembled perceptibly. He had neither the thin, colourless lips that would have made men distrust him, nor the thick lips that would have warned women to go slowly with him and to watch every step.

With obvious effort, he shook himself partially free of his mood. "What do you hate?" he asked, gently.

"Brown alpaca, sassafras tea, the eternal dishes, the scrubbing, the endless looking for dust where dust would never dare to stay, and—" She paused, and bit her lips.

Always Fighting

"Might as well go on," he urged, with a smile.

"I can't. It is n't nice of me."

"But it 's true. I don't know why you should n't hate your Grandmother and your Aunt Matilda. I do. It 's better to be truthful than nice."

"Is it?"

"Sincerity always has a charm of its own. Even when two men are fighting, you are compelled to admire their earnestness and singleness of purpose."

"I wish you lived where you could admire Grandmother and Aunt Matilda. They 're always fighting."

"No doubt. Is n't it a little early for sassafras tea?"

"I thought so, but Grandmother said Spring was coming early this year. She feels it in her bones and she intends to be ready for it."

"She should know the signs of the seasons, if anyone does. How old is she now?"

"Something past eighty."

"Suffering Moses! Eighty Springs and Summers and Autumns! Let me see—I was only twenty when I began with the grapes. If I live to be eighty, that means I 've got to go to town sixty times to buy baskets, sell the crop, and hire help—go through the whole process from Spring to frost sixty times, and I 've only done it ten times. Fifty more!

Slaves of the Vineyard

And when the imps who unwillingly learned their multiplication table from me are grandparents on their own account, I 'll still be saying: 'See the cat! Can the cat run? Yes, the cat can run.' "

"Why don't you sell the vineyard?" she asked, though her heart sank at the mere suggestion.

"Sell it? Why did n't the Ancient Mariner sell his albatross and take a nice little trip around the world on the proceeds? Mother would die of a broken heart if I mentioned it to her. The Marsh family have been the slaves of that vineyard since the first mistaken ancestor went into the grape business. We 've fertilised it, pruned it, protected it, tied it up, sat up nights with it, fanned the insects away from it, hired people to pick the fruit and pack it, fed the people, entertained them, sent presents to their wives and children—we 've done everything! And what have we had for it? Only a very moderate living, all the grapes we could eat, and a few bottles of musty old wine.

"Mother, of course, has very little to do with it, and, to her, it has come to represent some sort of entailed possession that becomes more sacred every year. It 's a family heirloom, like a title, or some very old and valuable piece of jewelry. Other people have family plate and family traditions, but we 've got

Happy Muses

a vineyard, or, to speak more truthfully, it has us."

"Look at the Muses," said Rosemary, after a silence. "Do you think they 've gone to sleep?"

The nine slender birches, that had apparently paused in their flight down the hillside, were, indeed, very still. Not a twig stirred, and the white trunks were ghostly in the twilight. Seemingly they leaned toward each other for protection and support; for comfort in the loneliness of the night.

"Happy Muses," he responded. "No vineyard to look after and no school to teach."

"And no Grandmother," continued Rosemary, "and no Aunt. Nor any dishes or brooms or scrubbing-brushes, or stoves that are possessed by evil spirits."

Star-like, a single light appeared in the front window of the big white house on the shore of the river. It was answered almost immediately by another, far across the stream.

"I like to watch the lights," the girl went on. "The first one is always in your house."

"Yes, I know. Mother dislikes twilight."

"Ours is the last—on account of the price of oil."

"Here," he said. "I almost forgot your book. And I brought you two candles this time. You must n't read by the light of one—you 'll spoil your eyes."

Saying Good-Night

"Oh, Mr. Marsh! Thank you so much!"

"You 're very welcome, Miss Starr."

"Please don't. I like to have you call me Rosemary."

"Then you must call me Alden. I 've been telling you that for almost two years."

"I know, but I can't make myself say it, somehow. You 're so much older and wiser than I."

"Don't be vain of your youth. I 'm only five years ahead of you, and, as for wisdom, anybody could teach a country school in Winter and grow grapes the rest of the time."

"I 'm not so sure of that. Come, it 's getting late."

They went down the hill together, hand in hand like two children. The young man's mood had changed for the better and he was whistling cheerfully. They stopped at the corner where she must turn to go home.

"Good-night," she said.

"Good-night, Rosemary. I wish I could come to see you sometimes."

"So do I, but it 's better that you should n't."

"I don't see why you can't come over in the evenings occasionally. I always read to Mother and you might as well listen, too. I 'd gladly take you home."

"It would be lovely," she sighed, "but I can't."

"You know best," he answered, shivering.

"It 's pretty cold up there most of the time."

"The heights are always cold, are n't they?"

"Yes, and they 're supposed to be lonely, too. Good-night again. Let me know how you like the book."

Woman-like, she watched him as he went down the street. She liked the way his head was set upon his broad shoulders; she admired his long, swinging stride. When his figure was lost in the gathering darkness she turned, regretfully, and went home.

II

Brown Alpaca

A Cheerless Room

AT seven o'clock, precisely, Grandmother Starr limped into the dining-room. It was one of her "lame" days, though sometimes she forgot which was her lame side, and limped irregularly and impartially with either foot, as chanced to please her erratic fancy.

A small lamp cast a feeble, unshaded light from the middle of the table, for the morning was dark, and the room smelled abominably of oil. The flickering rays picked out here and there a bit of tarnished gold from the wall paper, and, as though purposely, made the worn spots in the carpet unusually distinct. Meaningless china ornaments crowded the mantel, but there was no saving grace of firelight in the small black cavern beneath. A little stove, in one corner of the room, smoked industriously and refused to give out any heat.

"Rosemary," said Grandmother Starr, fretfully, "I don't see why you can't never learn to build a fire. Get me my shoulder shawl."

Cold and Cross

The girl compressed her pale lips into a thin, tight line. She was tired and her head ached, but she said nothing. She found the shawl, of red-and-black plaid, and spread it over the old lady's shoulders.

"I did n't say for you to put it on," remarked Grandmother, sourly. "If I 'd wanted you to put it on me, I 'd have said so. Guess I ain't so old yet but what I can put on my own shawl. What I want it for is to wrap up my hands in."

"Where 's my shawl?" demanded Aunt Matilda, entering the room at that moment.

Rosemary found the other shawl, of blue-and-brown plaid, and silently offered it to the owner.

Aunt Matilda inclined her grey head toward Rosemary. "You can put it on me if you like. I ain't ashamed to say I 'm cold when I am, and if I wanted to wrap up my hands, I 'd get my mittens—I would n't take a whole shawl."

"You ain't got no reason to be cold, as I see," remarked Grandmother, sharply. "Folks what lays abed till almost seven o'clock ought to be nice and warm unless they 're lazy. P'r'aps if you moved around more, your blood would warm you."

"Better try it," Matilda suggested, pointedly.

An angry flush mounted to Grandmother's temples, where the thin white hair was drawn

Head of the House

back so tightly that it must have hurt. "I 've moved around some in my day," she responded, shrilly, "but I never got any thanks for it. What with sweepin' and dustin' and scrubbin' and washin' and ironin' and bringin' up children and feedin' pigs and cows and chickens and churnin' and waitin' on your father, it 's no wonder I 'm a helpless cripple with the misery in my back."

"Dried peaches again," Matilda observed, scornfully, as Rosemary put a small saucer of fruit before her. "Who told you to get dried peaches?"

"I did, if you want to know," Grandmother snorted. "This is my house, ain't it?"

"I 've heard tell that it was," Matilda answered, "and I 'm beginnin' to believe it."

Miss Matilda was forty-six, but, in the pitiless glare of the odorous lamp, she looked much older. Her hair was grey and of uneven length, so that short, straight hair continually hung about her face, without even the saving grace of fluffiness. Her eyes were steel-blue and cold, her nose large and her mouth large also. Her lips drooped at the corners and there was a wart upon her chin.

Grandmother also had a wart, but it was upon her nose. Being a friendly and capable sort of wart, it held her steel-bowed spectacles at the proper angle for reading or knitting. During conversation, she peered over her spectacles,

and sometimes, to the discomfort of a sensitive observer, the steel frame appeared to divide her eyes horizontally.

They were very dark, beady eyes, set close together. At times they gleamed with the joy of conflict, but they always expressed a certain malicious cunning. With a single glance, she could make Rosemary feel mentally undressed. Had the girl's forehead been transparent, like the crystal of a watch, with the machinery of thought and emotion fully exposed to the eye of a master-mechanic, her sensation could not have differed from the helpless awe her grandmother so easily inspired.

Of course the breakfast was not right—it never was. The dried peaches were too sweet for one and not sweet enough for the other. Grandmother wanted her oatmeal cooked to a paste, but Aunt Matilda, whose teeth were better, desired something that must be chewed before it was swallowed, and unhesitatingly said so. The coffee was fated to please neither, though, as Rosemary found courage to say, you could n't expect good coffee on Friday when the same grounds had been used ever since Sunday morning.

"I 'd like to know what makes you so high and mighty all of a sudden," said Grandmother. "Coffee 's just like tea—as long as colour comes into it when it 's boiled it 's good. My mother always used the same grounds for

The Common Task

a week for a family of eight, and she did n't hear no complaints, neither. You ain't boiled this long enough—that 's what 's the matter."

Aunt Matilda muttered something about "beggars being choosers," and Rosemary pushed her plate away wearily. She had not tasted her breakfast.

Grandmother arose and noisily blew out the lamp, regardless of the fact that Matilda had not finished eating. "Now, Rosemary," she said, briskly, "after you get the dishes done and the kitchen cleaned up, I want you should go to the post-office and get my paper. When you come back, you can do the sweepin' and dustin' down here and I can set in the kitchen while you 're doin' it. Then you can make the beds and do the upstairs work and then go to the store. By the time you 're ready to go to the store, I 'll have decided what you 're to get."

"And," continued Aunt Matilda, pushing back her chair, "this afternoon you can help me cut out some underclothes and get 'em basted together." She never attempted any sort of housework, being pathetically vain of her one beauty—her small, white hands. Even the family sewing she did under protest.

"Is the alpaca all gone?" asked Grandmother.

"Yes," Matilda replied. "I used the last of it patchin' Rosemary's dress under the

arms. It beats all how hard she is on her clothes."

"I 'll have to order more," sighed the old lady. "I suppose the price has gone up again."

Rosemary's breath came and went quickly; her heart fluttered with a sudden wildness. "Grandmother," she pleaded, hesitatingly, "oh, Aunt Matilda—just for this once, could n't I have grey alpaca instead of brown? I hate brown so!"

Both women stared at her as though she had all at once gone mad. The silence became intense, painful.

"I mean," faltered the girl, "if it 's the same price. I would n't ask you to pay any more. Perhaps grey might be cheaper now—even cheaper than brown!"

"I was married in brown alpaca," said Grandmother. She used the tone in which royalty may possibly allude to coronation.

"I was wearing brown alpaca," observed Aunt Matilda, "the night the minister came to call."

"Made just like this," they said, together.

"If brown alpaca 's good enough for weddin's and ministers, I reckon it 'll do for orphans that don't half earn their keep," resumed Grandmother, with her keen eyes fixed upon Rosemary.

"What put the notion into your head?"

A Surprise Party

queried Aunt Matilda, with the air of one athirst for knowledge.

"Why—nothing," the girl stammered, "except that—when I was looking at mother's things the other day, up in the attic, I found some pink ribbon, and I thought it would be pretty with grey, and if I had a grey dress——"

The other two exchanged glances. "Ain't it wonderful," asked Matilda of her mother, "how blood will tell?"

"It certainly is," responded Grandmother, polishing her spectacles vigorously with a corner of the plaid shawl. "Your ma," she went on, to Rosemary, "was wearin' grey when your pa brought her here to visit us. They was a surprise party—both of 'em. We did n't even know he was plannin' marriage and I don't believe he was, either. We 've always thought your ma roped him into it, somehow."

Rosemary's eyes filled with mist and she bit her lips.

"She was wearin' grey," continued Aunt Matilda; "light grey that would show every spot. I told her it was n't a very serviceable colour and she had the impudence to laugh at me. 'It 'll clean, won't it?' she says, just like that, and Frank says, right after her, 'Yes, it 'll clean.' He knew a lot about it, he did. She had psychologised him."

"You mean hypnotised," interrupted Grand-

Resentment

mother. "There ain't no such word as 'psychologised.'"

"Well, if there ain't, there ought to be."

"The pink has come out in the blood, too," Grandmother remarked, adjusting her spectacles firmly upon the ever-useful and unfailing wart. "She was wearin' pink roses on her bonnet and pink ribbon strings. It would n't surprise me if it was the very strings what Rosemary has found in the trunk and is layin' out to wear."

"Me neither," Matilda chimed in.

"She was wearin' lace on her petticoats and high-heeled shoes, and all her handkerchiefs was fine linen," Grandmother continued. "Maybe you 'd like some lace ruffles under your grey alpaca, would n't you, Rosemary?"

The girl got to her feet blindly. She gathered up the dishes with cold hands that trembled, took them out into the kitchen, and noiselessly closed the door. Her heart was hot with resentment, even though she had heard the story, with variations, ever since she was old enough to understand it.

"Poor little mother," said Rosemary, to herself. "Dear little mother! Why could n't you have taken me with you!"

As Grandmother had said, for the hundredth time and more, Frank Starr had brought home his young wife unexpectedly. The surprise, in itself, was a shock from which she and

An Orphan

Matilda had never recovered. Even now, they were fond of alluding to the years of ill-health directly caused by it, and of subtly blaming Rosemary for it.

At the end of the third day, the young couple had departed hastily, the bride in tears. A year or so afterward, when Rosemary was born, the little mother died, having lived only long enough to ask that the baby be named "Rosemary"—Rose for her own mother and Mary for Grandmother Starr.

Stern, white-faced, and broken-hearted, Frank Starr brought his child to his mother and sister, and almost immediately went West. Intermittently he wrote briefly, sent money, gave insufficient addresses, or none at all, and, at length, disappeared. At the time his last letter was written, he had expected to take a certain steamer plying along the Western coast. As the ship was wrecked and he was never heard from again, it seemed that Rosemary was an orphan, dependent upon her grandmother and aunt.

In their way, they were kind to her. She was sent to school regularly, and had plenty to eat and wear, of a certain sort. Every Spring, Aunt Matilda made the year's supply of underclothing, using for the purpose coarse, unbleached muslin, thriftily purchased by the bolt. The brown alpaca and brown gingham, in which she and her grandmother and aunt

Year after Year

had been dressed ever since she could remember, were also bought by the piece. The fashion of the garments had not changed, for one way of making a gown was held to be as good as another, and a great deal easier, if the maker were accustomed to doing it.

So, year after year, Rosemary wore full skirts of brown alpaca, gathered into a band, and tight-fitting waists, boned and lined, buttoning down the front with a row of small jet buttons. The sleeves were always long, plain, and tight, no matter what other people were wearing. A bit of cheap lace gathered at the top of the collar was the only attempt at adornment.

The brown ginghams were made in the same way, except that the waists were not boned. The cheap white muslin, which served as Rosemary's best Summer gown, was made like the ginghams. Her Winter hat was brown felt, trimmed with brown ribbon, her Summer hat was brown straw, trimmed with brown ribbon, and her Winter coat was also brown, of some heavy material which wore surpassingly well.

For years her beauty-loving soul had been in revolt, but never before had she dared to suggest a change. The lump in her throat choked her as she washed the dishes, heedless of the tears that fell into the dish-pan. But activity is a sovereign remedy for the blues, and by the time the kitchen was made spotless,

Toiling Cheerfully

she had recovered her composure. She washed her face in cold water, dusted her red eyes with a bit of corn-starch, and put the cups and plates in their proper places.

She listened half-fearfully for a moment before she opened the door, dreading to hear the dear memory of her mother still under discussion, but Grandmother and Aunt Matilda were wrangling happily over the hair-wreath in the parlour. This was a fruitful source of argument when all other subjects had failed, for Grandmother insisted that the yellow rose in the centre was made from the golden curls of Uncle Henry Underwood's oldest boy, while Aunt Matilda was equally certain that it had come from Sarah Starr's second daughter by her first husband.

Throughout the day Rosemary toiled cheerfully. She swept, dusted, scrubbed, cooked, did errands, mailed the letter which made certain another bolt of brown alpaca, built fires, and, in the afternoon, brought down the heavy roll of unbleached muslin from the attic. Aunt Matilda cleared off the dining-room table, got out the worn newspaper patterns, and had sent Rosemary out for a paper of pins before she remembered that it was Friday, and that no new task begun on a Friday could ever be a success.

So, while Rosemary set the table for supper, the other two harked back to the fateful day

A Lucky Friday

when Frank Starr brought his wife home. They were in the next room, but their shrill voices carried well and Rosemary heard every word, though she earnestly wished that she need not.

"It was Friday, too, if you 'll remember, when Frank brought her," said Aunt Matilda, indicating Rosemary by an inclination of her untidy head.

"Then you can't say Friday 's always unlucky," commented Grandmother. "It may have been bad for us but it was good for her. Supposin' that butterfly had had her to bring up—what 'd she have been by now?"

"She resembles her ma some," answered Matilda, irrelevantly; "at least she would if she was pretty. She 's got the same look about her, somehow."

"I never thought her ma was pretty. It was always a mystery to me what Frank saw in her."

"Come to supper," called Rosemary, abruptly. She was unable to bear more.

The meal was unexpectedly enlivened by Grandmother's discovery of a well-soaked milk ticket in the pitcher. From the weekly issue of *The Household Guardian*, which had reached her that day, she had absorbed a vast amount of knowledge pertaining to the manners and customs of germs, and began to fear for her life. At first, it was thought to be

At the Close of the Day

Rosemary's fault, but upon recalling that for many years the ticket had always been left in the pitcher, the blame was shifted to the hapless milkman.

Some discussion ensued as to what should be said to the milkman and who should say it, but Rosemary observed, with more or less reason, that if his attention was called to the error, he might want another ticket. At length it was decided to say nothing, and Grandmother personally assumed charge of the ticket, putting it to dry between newspapers in the hope of using it again.

After supper, Rosemary washed the dishes, set the table for breakfast, and sat quietly, with her hands folded, until the others were ready to go to bed. She wrapped a hot brick in red flannel for each of them, put out the lamp, and followed them upstairs. Rejoicing in the shelter afforded by a closed door, she sat in the dark, shivering a little, until sounds suggestive of deep slumber came from the two rooms beyond.

Then she lighted the two candles that Alden Marsh had given her, and hurriedly undressed, pausing only to make a wry face at her unbleached muslin nightgown, entirely without trimming. She brushed her hair with a worn brush, braided it, tied it with a bit of shoestring, and climbed into bed.

After assuring herself of the best light pos-

sible, she unwrapped the little red book he had given her a few days before, and began to read, eagerly, one of the two wonderful sonnet sequences of which the English language boasts:

"Love's throne was not with these; but far above
All passionate wind of welcome and farewell
He sat in breathless bowers they dream not of;"

As by magic, the cares of the common day slipped away from her and her spirit began to breathe. Upon the heights she walked firmly now, and as surely as though she felt the hills themselves beneath her feet.

"Born with her life, creature of poignant thirst
And exquisite hunger, at her heart Love lay
Quickening in darkness, till a voice that day
Cried on him and the bonds of birth were burst."

And again:

"Lo! it is done. Above the enthroning threat
The mouth's mould testifies of voice and kiss,
The shadowed eyes remember and foresee.
Her face is made her shrine. Let all men note
That in all years (Oh, love, thy gift is this!)
They that would look on her must come to me."

The divine melody of the words stirred her to the depths of her soul. Hunger and thirst

The Unknown Joy

ran riot in her blood; her heart surged with the fulness of its tides.

"But April's sun strikes down the glades to-day;
So shut your eyes upturned, and feel my kiss
Creep, as the Spring now thrills through every spray,
Up your warm throat to your warm lips, for this. . . ."

Rosemary put the book aside with shaking hands. "I wonder," she thought, "how it would be if anyone should kiss me. Me," she whispered; "not the women in the books, but the real me."

The book slipped to the floor unheeded. She sat there in her ugly nightgown, yearning with every fibre of her for the unknown joy. The flickering light of the candles was answered by the strange fire that burned in her eyes. At last her head drooped forward and, blind with tears, she hid her face in her hands.

"Oh, dear God in Heaven," she prayed, passionately. "Open the door of the House of Life to me! Send someone to love me and to take me away, for Christ's sake—Amen!"

III

The Crystal Ball

"AM I late, Lady Mother?"

A Function

Madame Marsh turned toward Alden with a smile. "Only five minutes, and it does n't matter, since it 's Saturday."

"Five minutes," he repeated. "Some clever person once said that those who are five minutes late do more to upset the order of the universe than all the anarchists."

Madame's white hands fluttered out over the silver coffee service. "One lump or two?" she inquired, with the sugar-tongs poised over his cup.

"Two, please."

Of course she knew, but she liked to ask. She had been at the table, waiting for him, since the grandfather's clock in the hall struck eight.

In the old house on the shore of the river, breakfast was a function, luncheon a mild festivity, and dinner an affair of high state. Madame herself always appeared at dinner suitably clad, and, moreover, insisted upon

The Magic of Sunlight

evening clothes for her son. Once, years ago, he had protested at the formality.

"Why not?" she had queried coldly. "Shall we not be as civilised as we can?" And, again, when he had presented himself at the dinner hour in the serviceable garb of every day, she had refused to go to the table until he came down again, "dressed as a gentleman should be dressed after six o'clock."

The sunlight streamed into every nook and cranny of the room where they sat at breakfast. It lighted up the polished surfaces of old mahogany, woke forgotten gleams from the worn old silver, and summoned stray bits of iridescence from the prisms that hung from the heavy gilt chandeliers.

With less graciousness, it revealed several places on the frame of the mirror over the mantel, where the gold had fallen away and had been replaced by an inferior sort of gilding. By some subtle trickery with the lace curtain that hung at the open window, it laid an arabesque of delicate shadow upon the polished floor. In the room beyond, where Madame's crystal ball lay on the mahogany table, with a bit of black velvet beneath it, the sun had made a living rainbow that carried colour and light into the hall and even up the stairway.

As she sat with her back to it, the light was scarcely less gentle with Madame. It brought silver into her white hair, shimmered along the

silken surface of her grey gown, and deepened the violet shadows in her eyes. It threw into vivid relief the cameo that fastened the lace at her throat, rested for a moment upon the mellow gold of her worn wedding-ring as she filled Alden's cup, and paused reminiscently at the corner of her mouth, where there had once been a dimple.

Across the table, the light shone full upon Alden's face, but, man-like, he had no fear of it. Madame noted, with loving approval, how it illumined the dark depths of his eyes and showed the strength of his firm, boyish chin. Each day, to her, he grew more like his father.

"A penny for your thoughts," he said.

Madame sighed. "It seems so strange," she replied, after a pensive interval, "that I should be old and you should be young. You look so much like your father sometimes that it is as though the clock had turned back for him and I had gone on. You 're older now than he was when we were married, but I need my mirror to remind me that I 'm past my twenties."

"A woman and her mirror," laughed Alden, helping himself to a crisp muffin. "What tales each might tell of the other, if they would!"

"Don't misunderstand me, dear," she said, quickly. "It 's not that I mind growing old. I 've never been the unhappy sort of woman who desires to keep the year for ever at the

Spring. Each season has its own beauty—its own charm. We would tire of violets and apple-blossoms if they lasted always. Impermanence is the very essence of joy—the drop of bitterness that enables one to perceive the sweet."

"All of which is undoubtedly true," he returned, gallantly, "but the fact remains that you 're not old and never will be. You 're merely a girl who has powdered her hair for a fancy-dress ball."

"Flatterer!" she said, with affected severity, but the delicate pink flush that bloomed in her cheeks showed that she was pleased.

"Will you drive to-day?" he asked, as they rose from the table.

"I think not. I 'm a hot-house plant, you know, and it seems cold outside."

"Have the new books come yet?"

"Yes, they came yesterday, but I have n't opened the parcel."

"I hope they won't prove as disappointing as the last lot. There was n't a thing I could ask Rosemary to read. I 'm continually falling back on the old ones."

"The old books are the best, after all, like the old friends and the old ways."

Alden walked around the room restlessly, his hands in his pockets. At length he paused before the window overlooking the vineyard, on the other side of the valley. The slope

was bare of snow, now; the vines waited the call of Spring.

A soft footfall sounded beside him, then his mother put a caressing hand upon his shoulder. "It 's almost time to begin, is n't it?" she asked. Her beautiful old face was radiant.

Impatiently, he shook himself free from her touch. "Mother," he began, "let 's have it out once for all. I can't stand this any longer."

She sank into the nearest chair, with all the life suddenly gone from her face and figure. In a moment she had grown old, but presently, with an effort, she regained her self-command. "Yes?" she returned, quietly. "What do you wish to do?"

"Anything," he answered, abruptly—"anything but this. I want to get out where I can breathe, where the sky fits the ground as far as you can see—where it is n't eternally broken into by these everlasting hills. I 'd like to know that dinner would n't always be ready at seven o'clock—in fact, I 'd like sometimes not to have any dinner at all. I want to get forty miles from a schoolhouse and two hundred miles from a grape. I never want to see another grape as long as I live."

He knew that he was hurting her, but his insurgent youth demanded its right of speech after long repression. "I 'm a man," he cried, "and I want to do a man's work in the world and take a man's place. Just because my

Released.

ancestors chose to slave in a treadmill, I don't have to stay in it, do I? You have no right to keep me chained up here!"

The clock ticked loudly in the hall, the canary hopped noisily about his cage and chirped shrilly. A passing breeze came through the open window and tinkled the prisms that hung from the chandelier. It sounded like the echo of some far-away bell.

"No," said Madame, dully. "As you say, I have no right to keep you chained up here."

"Mother!" he cried, with swift remorse. "Don't misunderstand me!"

She raised her hand and motioned him to the chair opposite. "Your language is sufficiently explicit," she went on, clearing her throat. "There is no chance for anyone to misunderstand you. I am very sorry that I—I have not seen, that you have been obliged to ask for release from an—unpleasant—position. Go—whenever you choose."

He stared at her for a moment, uncomprehending. "Mother! Oh, Mother!" he whispered. "Do you really mean it? Where shall we go?"

"'We,'" she repeated. "Now I do misunderstand you."

"Why, Mother! What do you mean? Of course we shall go together!"

Madame rose from her chair, with some difficulty. "You have said," she went on,

choosing her words carefully, "that I had no right to keep you chained up here. I admit it—I have not. Equally, you have no right to uproot me."

"But, Mother! Why, I could n't go without you, and leave you alone. We belong together, you and I!"

The hard lines of her mouth relaxed, ever so little, but her eyes were very dark and stern. "As much as we belong together," she resumed, "we belong here. Dead hands built this house, dead hands laid out that vineyard, dead hands have given us our work. If we fail, we betray the trust of those who have gone before us—we have nothing to give to those who come.

"I 've seen," she continued, with rising passion. "You were determined from the first to fail!"

"Fail!" he echoed, with lips that scarcely moved.

"Yes, for no man fails except by his own choice. You might have been master of the vineyard, but you have preferred to have the vineyard master you. Confronted with an uncongenial task, you slunk away from it and shielded yourself behind the sophistry that the work was unworthy of you. As if any work were unworthy of a man!"

"I hate it," he murmured, resentfully.

"Yes, just as people hate their superiors. You hate it because you can't do it. Year by

The Name of Marsh

year, I have seen the crop grow less and less; year by year I have seen our income decreasing. We are living now on less than half of what we had when you took charge of the vineyard. Last year the grapes were so poor that I was ashamed to use them for wine. And to think," she flashed at him, bitterly, "that the name of Marsh used to stand for quality! What does it mean now? Nothing—thanks to you!"

The dull red rose to his temples and he cringed visibly. "I—I—" he stammered.

"One moment, please, and then I shall say no more. This is between you and your own manhood, not between you and your mother. I put no obstacles in your path—you may go when and where you choose. I only ask you to remember that a man who has failed to do the work that lies nearest his hand is not likely to succeed at anything else.

"It is not for you to say whether or not anything is worthy when it has once been given you to do. You have only to do it and make it worthy by the doing. When you have proved yourself capable, another task will be given you, but not before. You hate the vineyard because you cannot raise good grapes, you hate to teach school because you cannot teach school well. You want to find something easy to do—something that will require no effort."

"No," he interrupted, "you're mistaken

"I Belong Here"

there. I want to do something great—I 'm not asking for anything easy."

"Greatness comes slowly," she answered, her voice softening a little, "and by difficult steps—not by leaps and bounds. You must learn the multiplication table before you can be an astronomer. None the less, it is your right to choose."

"Then, granting that, why would n't you come with me?"

"Because it is also my right to choose for myself and I belong here. When I identified myself with the Marsh family, I did it in good faith. When I was married, I came here, my children were born here, your father and brother and sister died here, and I shall die here too. When you go, I shall do my best with the vineyard."

She spoke valiantly, but there was a pathetic little quiver in her lips as she said the last words. Alden stood at the window, contemplating the broad acres bordered with pine.

"Do not say *when* I go, Mother—say *if* I go."

"I thought you had decided," she murmured, but her heart began to beat quickly, nevertheless.

"No, I have n't, but I 'll decide in the course of the day. Good-bye for the present."

He stooped, kissed the cheek she turned to him, and went out, assuming a cheerfulness he did not feel. Madame leaned back in her

The Pictured Face

chair with her eyes closed, exhausted by the stress of emotion. The maid came in for orders, she gave them mechanically, then went into the living-room. She was anxious to be alone, but felt unequal to the exertion of climbing the stairs.

As the hours passed, she slowly regained her composure. It seemed impossible that Alden should go away and leave her when they two were alone in the world, and, as he said, belonged together. More than ever that morning had he looked like his father.

Old memories crowded thickly upon her as she sat there. Bits of her childhood flashed back at her out of the eternal stillness, "even as the beads of a told rosary." Since the day she met Alden's father, everything was clear and distinct, for, with women, life begins with love and the rest is as though it had never been.

An old daguerreotype was close at hand in a table drawer. She opened the ornate case tenderly, brushed the blue velvet that lined it, and kissed the pictured face behind the glass. So much had they borne together, so much had they loved, and all was gone—save this!

The serene eyes, for ever youthful, looked back at her across the years. Except for the quaint, old-fashioned look inseparable from an old picture, the face was that of the boy who had left her a few hours ago. The deep, dark eyes, the regular features, the firm

straight chin, the lovable mouth, the adorable boyishness—all were there, shut in by blue velvet and glass.

Madame smiled as she sat there looking at it. She had always had her way with the father—why should she doubt her power over the son? Supremely maternal as she was, the sheltering instinct had extended even to the man she loved. He had been outwardly strong and self-confident, assured, self-reliant, even severe with others, but behind the bold exterior, as always to the eyes of the beloved woman, had been a little, shrinking, helpless child, craving the comfort of a woman's hand —the sanctuary of a woman's breast.

Even in her own hours of stress and trial, she had feared to lean upon him too much, knowing how surely he depended upon her. He was more than forty when he died, yet to her he had been as one of her children, though infinitely dearer than any child could be.

The quick tears started at the thought of the children, for the childish prattle had so soon been hushed, the eager little feet had been so quickly stilled. Alden was the first-born son, with an older daughter, who had been named Virginia, for her mother. Virginia would have been thirty-two now, and probably married, with children of her own. The second son would have been twenty-eight, and, possibly, married also. There might have

The House of Memories

been a son-in-law, a daughter-in-law, and three or four children by this time, had these two lived.

So, through the House of Memories her fancy sped, as though borne on wings. Childish voices rang through the empty corridors and the fairy patter of tiny feet sounded on the stairs. One by one, out of the shadows, old joys and old loves came toward her; forgotten hopes and lost dreams. Hands long since mingled with the dust clasped hers once more with perfect understanding—warm lips were crushed upon hers with the old ecstasy and the old thrill. Even the sorrows, from which the bitterness had strangely vanished, came back out of the darkness, not with hesitancy, but with assurance, as though already welcomed by a friend.

Alden did not come home to luncheon, so Madame made only a pretence of eating. As the long afternoon wore away, she reproached herself bitterly for her harshness. There had been pain in the boy's eyes when he bent to kiss her—and she had turned her cheek.

She would have faced any sort of privation for this one beloved son—the only gift Life had not as yet taken back. Perhaps, after all, he knew best, for have not men led and women followed since, back in Paradise, the First Woman gave her hand trustingly to the First Man?

Visions in the Crystal Ball

Long, slanting sunbeams, alight with the gold of afternoon, came into the room by another window, and chanced upon the crystal ball. Madame's face grew thoughtful. "I wonder," she mused, "if I dare to try!"

She was half afraid of her own sorcery, because, so many times, that which she had seen had come true. Once, when a child was ill, she had gazed into the crystal and seen the little white coffin that, a week later, was carried out of the front door. Again, she had seen the vision of a wedding which was unexpectedly fulfilled later, when a passing cousin begged the hospitality of her house for a marriage.

She drew her chair up to the table, made sure of the proper light, and leaned over the ball. For a time there was darkness, then confused images that meant nothing, then at last, clear and distinct as a flash of lightning, her own son, holding a woman in his arms.

Madame pushed the ball aside, profoundly disturbed. Was the solution of their problem, then, to come in that way? And who was the woman?

In the dazzling glimpse she had caught no detail save a shimmering white gown and her son's face half hidden by the masses of the woman's hair. A faint memory of the hair persisted; she had never seen anything quite like it. Was it brown, or golden, or—perhaps red? Yes, red—that was it, and in all the

Alden's Decision

circle of their acquaintance there was no woman with red hair.

It was evident, then, that he was going away. Very well, she would go too. And when Alden had found his woman with the red hair, she would come back, alone—of course they would not want her.

She felt suddenly lonely, as though she had lived too long. For the first time, she forgot to light the candles on the mantel when the room became too dark to see. She had sat alone in the darkness for some time when she heard Alden's step outside.

When he came in, he missed the accustomed lights. "Mother!" he called, vaguely alarmed. Then, again: "Mother! Where are you, Mother dear?"

"I 'm here," she responded, rising from her chair and fumbling along the mantel-shelf for matches. "I 'm sorry I forgot the candles." The mere sound of his voice had made her heart leap with joy.

He was muddy and tired and his face was very white. "I know it 's late," he said, apologetically, "and I 'll go up to dress right now. I—I 've decided to—stay."

His voice broke a little on the last word. Madame drew his tall head down and kissed him, forgetting all about the crystal ball. "For your own sake?" she asked; "or for mine?"

An Unfair Advantage

"For yours, of course. I 'll try to do as you want me to, Lady Mother. I have nothing to do but to make you happy."

For answer, she kissed him again. "I must dress, too," she said.

When they met at dinner, half an hour later, neither made any reference to the subject that had been under discussion. Outwardly all was calm and peaceful, as deep-flowing waters may hide the rocks beneath. By the time coffee was served, they were back upon the old footing of affectionate comradeship.

Afterward, he read the paper while Madame played solitaire. When she turned the queen of hearts, she remembered the red-haired woman whom she had seen in the crystal ball. And they were not going away, after all! Madame felt that she had in some way gained an unfair advantage over the red-haired woman. There would be no one, now, to take her boy away from her.

And yet, when the time came for her to go, would she want Alden to live on in the old house alone, looking after the hated vineyard and teaching the despised school? At best, it could be only a few years more.

Feeling her grave, sweet eyes upon him, Alden looked up from his paper. "What is it, Mother?"

"Dear," she said, thoughtfully, "I want you to marry and bring me a daughter.

Madame's Dream

I want to hold your son in my arms before I die."

"Rather a large order, is n't it?" He laughed indifferently, and went on with his reading. Madame laughed, too, as she continued her solitaire, but, none the less, she dreamed that night that the house was full of women with red hair, and that each one was gazing earnestly into the depths of a crystal ball.

IV

April's Sun

The Joy of Morning

WITH a rush of warm winds and a tinkle of raindrops, Spring danced over the hills. The river stirred beneath the drifting ice, then woke into musical murmuring. Even the dead reeds and dry rushes at the bend of the stream gave forth a faint melody when swayed by the full waters beneath.

The joy of morning was abroad in the world. Robins sang it, winds whispered it, and, beneath the sod, every fibre of root and tree quivered with aspiration, groping through the labyrinth of darkness with a blind impulse toward the light. Across the valley, on the southern slope, a faint glow of green seemed to hover above the dark tangle of the vineyard, like some indefinite suggestion of colour, promising the sure beauty yet to come.

Rosemary had climbed the Hill of the Muses early in the afternoon. She, too, was awake, in every fibre of body and soul. Springs had come and gone before—twenty-five of them—but she had never known one like this. A vague delight possessed her, and

The Family Religion

her heart throbbed as from imprisoned wings. Purpose and uplift and aspiration swayed her strangely; she yearned blindly toward some unknown goal.

She had not seen Alden for a long time. The melting ice and snow had made the hill unpleasant, if not impossible, and the annual sewing had kept her closely indoors. She and Aunt Matilda had made the year's supply of underwear from the unbleached muslin, and one garment for each from the bolt of brown-and-white gingham. Rosemary disdained to say "gown" or even "dress," for the result of her labour was a garment, simply, and nothing more.

Every third Summer she had a new white muslin, of the cheapest quality, which she wore to church whenever it was ordained that she should go. Grandmother and Aunt Matilda were deeply religious, but not according to any popular plan. They had their own private path to Heaven, and had done their best to set Rosemary's feet firmly upon it, but with small success.

When she was a child, Rosemary had spent many long, desolate Sunday afternoons thinking how lonely it would be in Heaven with nobody there but God and the angels and the Starr family. Even the family, it seemed, was not to be admitted as an entity, but separately, according to individual merit. Grandmother

Rewards and Punishments

and Aunt Matilda had many a wordy battle as to who would be there and who would n't, but both were sadly agreed that Frank must stay outside.

Rosemary was deeply hurt when she discovered that Grandmother did not expect to meet her son there, and as for her son's wife—the old lady had dismissed the hapless bride to the Abode of the Lost with a single comprehensive snort. Alternately, Rosemary had been rewarded for good behaviour by the promise of Heaven and punished for small misdemeanours by having the gates closed in her face. As she grew older and began to think for herself, she wondered how Grandmother and Aunt Matilda had obtained their celestial appointment as gate-keepers, and reflected that it might possibly be very pleasant outside, with the father and mother whom she had never seen.

So, of late years, religion had not disturbed Rosemary much. She paid no attention to the pointed allusions to "heathen" and "infidels" that assailed her ears from time to time, and ceased to feel her young flesh creep when the Place of Torment was described with all the power of two separate and vivid imaginations. Disobedience troubled her no longer unless she was found out, and, gradually, she developed a complicated system of deception.

When she was discovered reading a novel,

Forbidden Reading

she had accepted the inevitable punishment with outward submission. Naturally, it was not easy to tear out the leaves one by one, especially from a borrowed book, and put them into the fire, saying, each time she put one in: "I will never read another novel as long as I live," but she had compelled herself to do it gracefully. Only her flaming cheeks had betrayed her real feeling.

A week later, when she was locked in her room for the entire day, on account of some slight offence, she had wept so much over the sorrows of Jane Eyre that even Aunt Matilda was affected when she brought up the bread and milk for the captive's supper. Rosemary had hidden the book under the mattress at the first sound of approaching footsteps, but Aunt Matilda, by describing the tears of penitence to the stern authority below, obtained permission for Rosemary to come down-stairs, eat her bread and milk at the table, and, afterward, to wash the dishes.

She continued to borrow books from the school library, however, and later from Alden Marsh. When he learned that she dared not read at night, for fear of burning too much oil, he began to supply her with candles. Thus the world of books was opened to her, and many a midnight had found her, absorbed and breathless, straining her eyes over the last page. More than once she had read all night

and fallen asleep afterward at the breakfast table.

Once, long ago, Alden had called upon her, but the evening was made so unpleasant, both for him and his unhappy hostess, that he never came again. Rosemary used to go to the schoolhouse occasionally, to sit and talk for an hour or so after school, but some keen-eyed busy-body had told Grandmother and the innocent joy had come to an abrupt conclusion. Rosemary kept her promise not to go to the schoolhouse simply because she dared not break it.

The windows of the little brown house, where the Starrs lived, commanded an unobstructed view of the Marshs' big Colonial porch, in Winter, when the trees between were bare, so it was impossible for the girl to go there, openly, as Mrs. Marsh had never returned Aunt Matilda's last call.

Sometimes Alden wrote to her, but she was unable to answer, for stationery and stamps were unfamiliar possessions; Grandmother held the purse-strings tightly, and every penny had to be accounted for. On Thursday, Rosemary always went to the post-office, as *The Household Guardian* was due then, so it happened that occasionally she received a letter, or a book which she could not return until Spring.

At length, the Hill of the Muses became the

Far Above Her

one possible rendezvous, though, at the chosen hour of four, Rosemary was usually too weary to attempt the long climb. Moreover, she must be back by six to get supper, so one little hour was all she might ever hope for, at a time.

Yet these hours had become a rosary of memories to her, jewelled upon the chain of her uneventful days. Alden's unfailing friendliness and sympathy warmed her heart, though she had never thought of him as a possible lover. In her eyes, he was as far above her as the fairy prince had been above Cinderella. It was only kindness that made him stoop at all.

When the school bell, sounding for dismissal, echoed through the valley below, Rosemary hung her scarlet signal to the outstanding bough of the lowest birch, and went back to the crest of the hill to wait for him. She had with her the little red book that he had given her long ago, and which she had not had opportunity to return.

She turned the pages regretfully, though she knew the poems almost by heart. Days, while she washed dishes and scrubbed, the exquisite melody of the words haunted her, like some far-off strain of music. For the first time she had discovered the subtle harmonies of which the language is capable, entirely apart from sense.

Living lines stood out upon the printed page, glowing with a rapture all their own.

Thrilling Lines

"Now, shadowed by his wings, our faces yearn
Together,"

she read aloud, thrilled by the very sound.

"Tender as dawn's first hill-fire," . . . "What marshalled marvels on the skirts of May," . . . "Shadows and shoals that edge eternity." . . .

"Oh," she breathed, "if only I did n't have to give it back!"

"Lo! what am I to Love, the lord of all?
One murmuring shell he gathers from the sand,—
One little heart-flame sheltered in his hand."

"What, indeed?" thought Rosemary. What was she to Love, or what ever might she be?

"But April's sun strikes down the glades to-day;
So shut your eyes upturned, and feel my kiss
Creep, as the Spring now thrills through every spray,
Up your warm throat to your warm lips: for this"...

Rosemary put the book down, face to face at last with self-knowledge. She would have torn down the flaming signal, but it was too late. If he were coming—and he never had failed to come—he would be there very soon.

Alden had closed his desk with a sigh as the last pair of restless little feet tumbled down

Uneventful Days

the schoolhouse steps. Scraps of paper littered the floor and the room was musty and close in spite of two open windows. From where he sat, he could see the vineyard, with its perpetual demand upon him. Since his painful interview with his mother, he had shrunk, inwardly, from even the sight of the vineyard. It somehow seemed to have a malicious air about it. Mutely it challenged his manhood, menaced his soul.

He had accepted the inevitable but had not ceased to rebel. The coming years stretched out before him in a procession of grey, uneventful days. Breakfast, school, luncheon, school, long evenings spent in reading to his mother, and, from Spring to frost, the vineyard, with its multitudinous necessities.

He felt, keenly, that his mother did not quite understand him. In fact, nobody did, unless it was Rosemary, whom he had not seen for weeks. Brave little Rosemary, for whom life consisted wholly of deprivations! How seldom she complained and how often she had soothed his discontent!

It was three years ago that she had come shyly to the schoolhouse and asked if she might borrow a book. He had known her, of course, before that, but had scarcely exchanged a dozen words with her. When he saw her, rarely, at church, Grandmother or Aunt Matilda was always with her, and the Starrs had had

A Growing Interest

nothing to do with the Marshs for several years past, as Mrs. Marsh had been remiss in her social obligations.

At first, Rosemary had been purely negative to him, and he regarded her with kindly indifference. The girl's personality seemed as ashen as her hair, as colourless as her face. Her dull eyes seemed to see nothing, to care for nothing. Within the last few months he had begun to wonder whether her cold and impassive exterior might not be the shield with which she protected an abnormal sensitiveness. Now and then he had longed to awaken the woman who dwelt securely within the forbidding fortress—to strike from the flint some stray gleams of soul.

Of late he had begun to miss her, and, each afternoon, to look with a little more conscious eagerness for the scarlet thread on the hilltop signalling against the grey sky beyond. His interest in her welfare was becoming more surely personal, not merely human. During the Winter, though he had seen her only twice, he had thought about her a great deal, and had written to her several times without expecting an answer.

The iron bars of circumstance which bound her, had, though less narrowly, imprisoned him also. It seemed permanent for them both, and, indeed, the way of escape was even more definitely closed for Rosemary than for him.

A New Rosemary

He sighed as he rose and brushed the chalk from his clothes. Through force of habit, he looked up to the crest of the Hill of the Muses as he locked the door. The red ribbon fluttered like an oriflamme against the blue-and-white of the April sky. His heart quickened its beat a little as he saw it, and his steps insensibly hastened as he began to climb the hill.

When he took her hand, with a word of friendly greeting, he noticed a change in her, though she had made a valiant effort to recover her composure. This was a new Rosemary, with eyes shining and the colour flaming in her cheeks and lips.

"Spring seems to have come to you, too," he said, seating himself on the log beside her. "How well you look!"

The deep crimson mounted to her temples, then as swiftly retreated. "Better take down the ribbon," she suggested, practically.

"I 've been watching a long time for this," he resumed, as he folded it and restored it to its place in the hollow tree. "What have you been doing?"

"All the usual dreary things, to which a mountain of sewing has been added."

"Is that a new gown?"

She laughed, mirthlessly. "It 's as new a gown as I 'll ever have," she returned, trying to keep her voice even. "My wardrobe consists of an endless parade of brown alpaca and

brown gingham garments, all made exactly alike."

"Like a dozen stage soldiers, marching in and out, to create the illusion of a procession?"

"I suppose so. You know I 've never seen a stage, much less a stage soldier."

Alden's heart softened with pity. He longed to take Rosemary to town and let her feast her eyes upon some gorgeous spectacle; to see her senses run riot, for once, with colour and light and sound.

"I feel sometimes," she was saying, "as though I had sold my soul for pretty things in some previous existence, and was paying the penalty for it now."

"You love pretty things, don't you?"

She turned brimming eyes toward him. "Love them?" she repeated, brokenly. "There are n't words enough to say how much!"

From a fresh point of view he saw her countless deprivations, binding her, thwarting her, oppressing her on all sides by continual denial. His own rebellion against circumstances seemed weak and unworthy.

"Whenever I think of you," he said, in a different tone, "I feel ashamed of myself. I have freedom, of a certain sort, and you 've never had a chance to learn the meaning of the word. You 're dominated, body and soul, by a couple of old women who have n't discovered, as yet, that the earth is round and not flat."

Freedom

"My soul is n't bound," returned Rosemary, softly, "but it would have been, if it had n't been for you."

"I? Why, my dear girl, what have I done?"

"Everything. Think of all the books you 've loaned me, all the candles you 've given me—all the times you 've climbed this steep hill just to talk to me for an hour and give me new strength to go on."

"It 's only selfishness, Rosemary. I knew you were here and I like to talk to you. Don't forget that you 've meant something to me, too. Why, you 're the only woman I know, except my mother."

"Your mother is lovely," she returned. "I wish I could go to see her once in a while. I like to look at her. Even her voice is different someway."

"Yes, mother is 'different,'" he agreed, idly. "It 's astonishing, sometimes, how 'different' she manages to be. We had it out the other day, about the vineyard, and I 'm to stay here—all the rest of my life," he concluded bitterly.

"I don't see why, if you don't want to," she answered, half-fearfully. "You 're a man, and men can do as they please."

"It probably seems so to you, but I assure you it 's very far from the truth. I wonder, now and then, if any of us ever really do as we please. Freedom is the great gift."

"And the great loneliness," she added, after a pause.

"You may be right," he sighed. "Still, I 'd like to try it for a while. It 's the one thing I 'd choose. What would you take, if you could have anything you wanted?"

"Do you mean for just a little while, or for always?"

"For always. The one great gift you 'd choose from all that Life has to give."

"I 'd take love," she said, in a low tone. She was not looking at him now, but far across the valley where the vineyard lay. Her face was wistful in the half-light; the corners of her mouth quivered, ever so little.

Alden looked at her, then rubbed his eyes and looked at her again. In some subtle way she had changed, or he had, since they last met. Never before had he thought of her as a woman; she had been merely another individual to whom he liked to talk. To-day her womanhood carried its own appeal. She was not beautiful and no one would ever think her so, but she was sweet and wholesome and had a new, indefinable freshness about her that, in another woman, would have been called charm.

It came to him, all at once, that, in some mysterious way, he and Rosemary belonged together. They had been born to the same lot, and must spend all their days in the valley.

The Book

hedged in by the same narrow restrictions. Even an occasional hour on the Hill of the Muses was forbidden to her, and constant scheming was the price she was obliged to pay for it.

The restraint chafed and fretted him, for her as much as for himself. It was absurd that a girl of twenty-five and a man of thirty should not have some little independence of thought and action. The silence persisted and finally became awkward.

"It 's the book," said Rosemary, with a forced laugh. She was endeavouring to brush her mood away as though it were an annoying cobweb. "I 've grown foolish over the book."

"I 'm glad you liked it," he returned, taking it from her. "I was sure you would. What part of it did you like best?"

"All of it. I can't choose, though of course some of it seems more beautiful than the rest."

"I suppose you know it by heart, now, don't you?"

"Almost."

"Listen. Is n't this like to-day?"

> "Spring's foot half falters; scarce she yet may know
> The leafless blackthorn-blossom from the snow;
> And through her bowers the wind's way still is clear."

Rosemary got to her feet unsteadily. She went to the brow of the hill, on the side farthest

Alden Speaks

from the vineyard, and stood facing the sunset. Scarcely knowing that she had moved, Alden read on:

"But April's sun strikes down the glades to-day;
So shut your eyes upturned, and feel my kiss——"

A smothered sob made him look up quickly. She stood with her back to him, but her shoulders were shaking. He dropped the book and went to her.

A strange, new tenderness possessed him. "Rosemary," he whispered, slipping his arm around her. "What is it—dear?"

"Nothing," she sobbed, trying to release herself. "I 'm—I 'm tired—and foolish—that 's all. Please let me go!"

Something within him stirred in answer to the girl's infinite hunger, to the unspoken appeal that vibrated through her voice. "No," he said, with quiet mastery, "I won't let you go. I want to take care of you, Rosemary. Leave all that misery and come to me, won't you?"

Her eyes met his for an instant, then turned away. "I don't quite—understand," she said, with difficulty.

"I 'm asking you to marry me—to come to mother and me. We 'll make the best of it together."

Her eyes met his clearly now, but her face

was pale and cold. She was openly incredulous and frightened.

"I mean it, dear. Don't be afraid. Oh, Rosemary, can't you trust me?"

"Trust you? Yes, a thousand times, yes!"

He drew her closer. "And love me—a little?"

"Love you?" The last light shone upon her face and the colour surged back in waves. She seemed exalted, transfigured, as by a radiance that shone from within.

He put his hand under her chin and lifted her face to his. "Kiss me, won't you, dear?"

And so, Rosemary came to her woman's birthright, in the shelter of a man's arms.

V

The House of the Broken Heart

Climbing in the Dark

THE road was steep and very dark, but some unseen Power compelled her to climb. Dimly, through the shadow, she saw shafts of broken marbles and heard the sound of slow-falling waters. The desolation oppressed her, and, as she climbed, she pressed her hands tightly to her heart.

She was alone in an empty world. All traces of human occupation had long since vanished. Brambles and thorns grew thickly about her, and her brown gingham dress was torn to shreds. Rosemary shuddered in her dream, for Grandmother and Aunt Matilda would be displeased.

And yet, where were they? She had not seen them since she entered the darkness below. At first she had been unable to see anything, for the darkness was not merely absence of light but had a positive, palpable quality, It enshrouded her as by heavy folds of black velvet that suffocated her, but, as she climbed, the air became lighter and the darkness less.

The path in the Garden

She longed to stop for a few moments and rest, but the pitiless Power continually urged her on. Bats fluttered past her and ghostly wings brushed her face, but, strangely, she had no fear. As her eyes became accustomed to the all-encompassing night, she saw into it for a little distance on either side, but never ahead.

On the left was a vast, empty garden, neglected and dead. The hedge that surrounded it was only a tangled mass of undergrowth, and the paths were buried and choked by weeds. The desolate house beyond it loomed up whitely in the shadow. It was damp and cold in the garden, but she went in, mutely obeying the blind force that impelled her to go.

She struggled up the path that led to the house, falling once into a mass of thistles that pricked and stung. The broken marbles, as she saw now, were statues that had been placed about the garden and had fallen into decay. The slow-falling water was a fountain that still murmured, choked though it was by the dense undergrowth.

One of the steps that led to the house had fallen inward, so she put her knee on the one above that and climbed up. She tested each step of the long flight carefully before she trusted herself to it. When she reached the broad porch, her footsteps echoed strangely

upon the floor. Each slight sound was caught up and repeated until it sounded like the tread of a marching army, vanishing into the distance.

The heavy door creaked on its hinges when she opened it. That sound, too, echoed and re-echoed in rhythmic pulsations that beat painfully upon her ears, but, after she was once inside, all the clamour ceased.

She could see clearly now, though it was still dark. A long, wide stairway wound up from the hall, and there were two great rooms upon either side. She turned into the wide doorway at the right.

Windows, grey with cobwebs, stretched from floor to ceiling, but very little light came through them. The wall paper, of indistinguishable pattern, was partially torn from the walls and the hanging portions swayed in the same current of air that waved the cobwebs. There was no furniture of any description in the room, except the heavy, gilt-framed mirror over the mantel. It was cracked and much of the gilt frame had fallen away. She went into the next room, then into the one beyond that, which seemed to stretch across the back of the house, and so through the door at the left of the room into the two on the other side of the house, at the left of the hall.

In the centre of the largest room was a

The Broken Heart

small table, upon which rested a small object covered with a dome-shaped glass shade, precisely like that which covered the basket of wax flowers in Grandmother's parlour. Rosemary went to it with keen interest and leaned over the table to peer in.

At first she could see nothing, for the glass was cloudy. She noted, with a pang of disgust, that the table-cover was made of brown alpaca, fringed all around by the fabric itself, cut unskilfully into shreds with the scissors. As she looked, the glass slowly cleared.

The small object was heart-shaped and made of wax in some dull colour half-way between red and brown. At length she saw that it was broken and the pieces had been laid together, carefully. Unless she had looked very closely she would not have seen that it was broken.

Suddenly she felt a Presence in the room, and looked up quickly, with terror clutching at her inmost soul. A tall, grey figure, mysteriously shrouded, stood motionless beside her. Only the eyes were unveiled and visible amid the misty folds of the fabric.

The eyes held her strangely. They were deep and dark and burning with secret fires. Hunger and longing were in their depths, and yet there was a certain exaltation, as of hope persisting against the knowledge of defeat.

Rosemary's terror gradually vanished. She

felt an all-pervading calmness, a sense of acceptance, of fulfilment.

Not of One's own Choice

For a long time she stood there, transfixed by the eyes that never for an instant wavered from hers. They searched her inmost soul; they saw all things past and to come. They questioned her, challenged her, urged something upon her, and yet she was not afraid.

At last, with dry lips, she spoke. "Who are you?" She did not recognise the sound of her own voice.

"The Lord of Life," the figure answered, in low, deep tones that vibrated through the empty rooms like the swept strings of a harp.

"And this is—?"

"The House of the Broken Heart. I live here."

"Why?" she asked.

"Not of my own choice. Why have you come?"

"Not of my own choice," she repeated, dully. "I came because I had to."

"They all do. That is why I myself am here."

"Do—do many come?"

"Yes."

Rosemary looked back over her shoulder, then lifted her eyes to those of the grey figure. "Then it is strange," she said, "that I am here alone."

"You are not alone. These rooms are full,

Selfish Grief

but no one sees another in the House of the Broken Heart. Each one is absorbed in his own grief to the exclusion of all else. Only I may see them, with bowed heads, pacing to and fro.

"On the stairway," he went on, "is a young mother who has lost her child. She goes up and down endlessly, thinking first she hears it crying for her in the room above, and then in the room below. Her husband sits at the foot of the stairs with his face hidden in his hands, but she has no thought for him. He has lost wife and child too."

"Poor man!" said Rosemary, softly. "Poor woman!"

"Yonder is a grey-haired woman, reaping the bitterness that she has sown. There are a husband and wife who have always been jealous of one another, and will be, until the end of time. There is a girl who has trusted and been betrayed, but she will go out again when her courage comes back. Just behind you is a woman who has estranged her husband from his family and has found his heart closed to her in the hour of her greatest need. Coming toward you is a man who was cruel to his wife, and never knew it until after she was dead."

"But," Rosemary asked, "is there no punishment?"

"None whatever, except this. The consciousness of a sin is its own punishment."

She stood there perplexed, leaning against the table. "Have all who are here, then, sinned?"

"No, some have been sinned against, and a few, like yourself, have come in by mistake."

"Then I may go?"

The Lord of Life bent his head graciously. "Whenever you choose. You have only to take your gift and depart."

"Is there a gift here for me? Nobody ever gave me anything."

"Some one gift is yours for the asking, and, because you have not sinned, you have the right to choose. What shall it be?"

"Love," returned Rosemary, very wistfully. "Oh, give me love!"

The Lord of Life sighed. "So many ask for that," he said. "They all confuse the end with the means. What they really want is joy, but they ask for love."

"Is there a greater joy than love?"

"No, but love in itself is not joy. It is always service and it may be sacrifice. It means giving, not receiving; asking, not answer."

"None the less," said Rosemary, stubbornly, "I will take love."

"They all do," he returned. "Wait."

He vanished so quickly that she could not tell which way he had gone. As she leaned against the table, the brown alpaca cover slipped back on the marble table and the glass

The Symbol of Hope

case tottered. She caught it hurriedly and saved it from falling, but the waxen pieces of the heart quivered underneath.

The grey figure was coming back, muffled to the eyes as before, but his footsteps made no sound. He moved slowly, yet with a certain authority. He laid a letter on the table and Rosemary snatched it up eagerly. It was addressed to Mrs. Virginia Marsh.

"That is not for me," she said, much disappointed. "My name is Rosemary Starr."

"It must have something to do with you," he returned, unmoved. "However, I will keep it until the owner comes."

"She does n't belong here," Rosemary answered, somewhat resentfully. "She 's the dearest, sweetest woman in the world. She 's Alden's mother."

"The one who wrote it may be here, or coming," he explained, patiently. "Sometimes it happens that way. There are many letters in this place."

As he spoke, he placed a green wreath upon Rosemary's head and gave her a white lily, on a long stem. "Go," he said, kindly.

"But my gift?"

"Go and find it. Carry your symbol of Hope and wear your wreath of rue. You will come to it."

"But where? How shall I go from here? I 'm afraid I shall lose my way."

The stern eyes fixed themselves upon her steadily. "Do not question Life too much," he warned her. "Accept it. Have I not told you to go?"

Her fear suddenly returned. She went backward, slowly, toward the door, away from the table and the tall grey figure that stood by it, holding the letter addressed to Mrs. Virginia Marsh. When she was outside, she drew a long breath of relief. It was daybreak, and grey lights on the far horizon foreshadowed the sunrise.

She ran down the steps, stumbling as she passed the broken one, and went hurriedly down the weed-choked path. The broken marble statues were green with mould and the falling waters seemed to move with difficulty, like the breath of one about to die. The stillness of the place was vast and far-reaching; it encompassed her as the night had previously done.

She soon found the trail that led upward, though she did not recognise the point at which she had turned into the garden. She had no doubt, now, about the path she must take. It led up, up, through thorns and brambles, past the crags upon which the first light shone, and around the crest of the peak to—what? Drawing a long breath, Rosemary started, carrying her lily and wearing her wreath of rue.

The Coming Dawn

The brown gingham hung in tatters and her worn shoes threatened to drop from her feet, but the divine fragrance of the lily she bore sustained her as she climbed. She was glad she had chosen as she had, though his words still puzzled her. "It is always service," she repeated, "and it may be sacrifice. It means giving, not receiving; asking, not answer."

"And yet," she mused, "he said they all asked for it. I should have taken the letter," she continued, to herself. "Alden could have given it to his mother."

It seemed strange to be thinking of him as "Alden" instead of "Mr. Marsh," and yet it was supremely sweet. She felt the colour burning in her cheeks, for she knew, now, that he awaited her, somewhere on the height. Had he not chosen Love too? Were they not to find it together?

Dull, prismatic fires glowed upon the distant clouds—dawn-jewels laid upon the breast of Night. Violet and blue mellowed into opal and turquoise, then, as the spectrum may merge into white light, a shaft of sunrise broke from the mysterious East, sending a javelin of glory half-way across the world.

The first light lay upon the crags, then deepened and spread, penetrating the darkness below, which was no longer black, but dusky purple. Rosemary's heart sang as she climbed, and the fragrance of the lily thrilled her soul

The Blood-Stained Lily

with pure delight. The path was smooth, now, and thorns no longer hurt her feet. The hand that held the lily, however, was bleeding, from some sharp thorn or projection of rock.

She wiped her hand upon her torn dress, and, as she did so, a drop of blood stained the lily. She tried to get it off, but all her efforts were fruitless. The crimson spread and darkened until half of the white petals were dyed. She noted, with a queer lump in her throat, that the lily was the same colour as the waxen heart that lay under the glass case in the house she had so recently left.

But she still held it tightly, though it was stained and no longer fragrant. Up somewhere in the sunrise Alden was waiting for her, and she climbed breathlessly. She was exhausted when she reached the summit, and the wreath of rue pressed heavily upon her temples.

She paused for a moment, realising that she had reached the end of her journey. Rainbow mists surrounded the height, but, as she looked, they lifted. She was not surprised to see Alden standing there. He had been hidden by the mists.

With a little laugh of joy, Rosemary tried to run toward him, but her feet refused to move. Then she called: "Alden!" and again, in a troubled tone: "Mr. Marsh!"

Calling in vain

But only the echo of her own voice came back to her, for Alden did not move. Strong and finely-moulded, his youth surrounded him like some radiant garment of immortality. Every line of his figure was eloquent of his lusty manhood, and his face glowed not only from the sunrise, but from some inner light.

"Service, sacrifice. Giving, not receiving; asking, not answer." The words reverberated through her consciousness like a funeral knell. She dropped the stained lily and called again, weakly: "Alden!"

But, as before, he did not answer. His eyes were fixed upon a distant point where the coloured mists were slowly lifting. Rosemary, cold and still, could only stand there and watch, for her feet refused to stir.

Hungrily, she gazed upon him, but he did not see, for he was watching the drifting rainbow beyond. Then a cry of rapture broke from him and he started eagerly toward the insurmountable crags that divided him from the Vision.

Rosemary saw it, too, at the same instant—a woman whose white gown shimmered and shone, and whose face was hidden by the blinding glory of her sunlit hair.

She woke, murmuring his name, then rubbed her eyes. It took her several minutes to realise that it was all a dream. She was in her

own little room in the brown house, and the sun was peeping through the shutters. The holes in the rag carpet, the cheap, cracked mirror, the braided mat in front of her wash-stand, and the broken pitcher all contrived to reassure her.

She sat up in bed, knowing that it was time to get up, but desperately needing a few moments in which to adjust herself to her realities. What had happened? Nothing, indeed, since yesterday—ah, that dear yesterday, when life had begun! What could ever happen now, when all the future lay fair before her and the miseries of her twenty-five years were overwhelmed by one deep intoxicating joy?

"Dreams," thought Rosemary, laughing to herself. "Ah, what are dreams!"

She opened the shutters wide and the daylight streamed in. It was not fraught with colour, like the mists of her dream, but was the clear, sane light of every day. A robin outside her window chirped cheerily, and a bluebird flashed across the distant meadow, then paused on the rushes at the bend of the river and swayed there for a moment, like some unfamiliar flower.

"Rosemary!" The shrill voice sounded just outside her door.

"Yes, Aunt Matilda," she answered, happily; "I 'm coming!"

She sang to herself as she moved about her

Service and Sacrifice

room, loving the dear, common things of every day—the splash of cool water on her face and throat, the patchwork quilt, and even the despised brown gingham, which was, at least, fresh and clean.

"Service," she said to herself, "and sacrifice. Giving, not receiving; asking, and not answer. I wonder if it's true!" For an instant she was afraid, then her soul rallied as to a bugle call. "Even so," she thought, "I 'll take it, and gladly. I 'll serve and sacrifice and give, and never mind the answer."

She hurried downstairs, where the others were waiting. "You 're late, Rosemary," said Grandmother, sourly.

"Yes, I know," laughed the girl, stooping to kiss the withered cheek. "I 'm sorry! I won't let it happen again!"

Out in the kitchen, she sang as she worked, and the clatter of pots and pans kept up a merry accompaniment. She had set the table the night before, as usual, so it was not long before she had breakfast ready. Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes were shining when she came in with the oatmeal.

"This is for you, Aunt Matilda—it is n't cooked quite so much. This is for you, Grandmother. It 's nice and soft, for I soaked it over night. I 'll have the eggs ready in just a minute."

When she went out, the other two exchanged

glances. "What," asked Grandmother, "do you reckon has got into Rosemary?"

"I don't know," returned Aunt Matilda, gloomily. "Do you suppose it 's religion?"

"I ain't never seen religion affect anybody like that, have you?"

"No, I ain't," Aunt Matilda admitted, after a moment's pondering.

"She reminds me of her ma," said Grandmother, reminiscently, "the day Frank brought her home."

What Has Happened?

VI

More Stately Mansions

A New Point of View

THE new joy surged in every heart-beat as Rosemary went up the Hill of the Muses, late in the afternoon. Instinctively, she sought the place of fulfilment, yearning to be alone with the memory of yesterday.

Nothing was wrong in all the world; nothing ever could be wrong any more. She accepted the brown alpaca and the brown gingham as she did the sordid tasks of every day. That morning, for the first time, it had been a pleasure to wash dishes and happiness to build a fire.

Grandmother and Aunt Matilda had been annoyances to her ever since she could remember. Their continual nagging had fretted her, their constant restraint had chafed her, their narrowness had cramped her. To-day she saw them from a new point of view.

Grandmother was no longer a malicious spirit of evil who took delight in thwarting her, but a poor, fretful old lady whose soul was bound in shallows. And Aunt Matilda? Rosemary's eyes filled at the thought of Aunt

Matilda, unloved and unsought. Nobody wanted her, she belonged to nobody, in all her lonely life she had had nothing. She sat and listened to Grandmother, she did the annual sewing, and day by day resented more keenly the emptiness of her life. It was the conscious lack that made them both cross. Rosemary saw it now, with the clear vision that had come to her during the past twenty-four hours.

She wanted to be very kind to Grandmother and Aunt Matilda. It was not a philanthropic resolution, but a spontaneous desire to share her own gladness, and to lead the others, if she might, from the chill darkness in which they dwelt to the clear air of the heights.

Oh, but it was good to be alive! The little birds that hopped from bough to bough chirped ecstatically, the nine silver-clad birches swayed and nodded in the cool wind, and the peaceful river in the valley below sparkled and dimpled at the caress of the sun. The thousand sounds and fragrances of Spring thrilled her to eager answer; she, too, aspired and yearned upward as the wakened grass-blades pierced the sod and the violets of last year dreamed once more of bloom.

Yesterday she had emerged from darkness into light. She had been born again as surely as the tiny dweller of the sea casts off his shell. The outworn habitation of the past was for-

The Same, Yet Different

ever left behind her, to be swept back, by the tides of the new life, into some forgotten cave.

"Build thee more stately mansions, oh my soul,
As the swift seasons roll."

The words said themselves aloud. She had learned the whole poem long ago, but, to-day, the beautiful lines assumed a fresh significance, for had she not, by a single step, passed from the cell of self into comradeship with the whole world? Was she not a part of everything and had not everything become a part of her? What could go wrong when the finite was once merged with the infinite, the individual with the universal soul?

She sat down on the log that Alden had rolled back against the two trees, three years ago, when they had first begun to come to the Hill of the Muses for an occasional hour of friendly talk. Everything was the same, and yet subtly different, as though seen from another aspect or in another light. Over yonder, on the hillside farthest from the valley, he had put his arm around her and refused to let her go.

She remembered vividly every word and every look and that first shy kiss. Of course they belonged together! How foolish they had been not to see it before! Was she not the only woman he knew, and was he not the

An Unwonted Shyness

only man to whom she could say more than "How do you do?" God had meant it so from the beginning, ever since He said: "Let there be light, and there was light."

Dreaming happily, Rosemary sat on the fallen tree, leaning against the great oak that towered above her. The first pink leaves had come out upon the brown branches, and through them she could see the blue sky, deep as turquoise, without a single cloud. It seemed that she had always been happy, but had never known it until this new light shone upon her, flooding with divine radiance every darkened recess of her soul.

She went to the hollow tree, took out the wooden box, and unwound the scarlet ribbon. Yesterday, little dreaming of the portent that for once accompanied the signal, she had tied it in its accustomed place, and gone back, calmly to wait. The school bell echoed through the valley as she stood there, her eyes laughing, but her mouth very grave. She had taken two or three steps toward the birches when an unwonted shyness possessed her, and she hurried back.

"I can't," she said to herself. "Oh, I can't—to-day!"

So she restored it to its place, wondering, as she did so, why love should make such mysterious changes in the common things of every day. Won and awakened though she

Waiting

was, her womanhood imperatively demanded now that she must be sought and never seek, that she must not even beckon him to her, and that she must wait, according to her destiny, as women have waited since the world began.

Yet it was part of the beautiful magic of the day that presently he should come to her, unsummoned save by her longing and his own desire.

"Where is the ribbon?" he inquired, reproachfully, when he came within speaking distance.

"Where it belongs," she answered, with a flush.

"Did n't you want me to come?"

"Of course."

"Then why did n't you hang it up?"

"Just because I wanted you to come."

Alden laughed at her feminine inconsistency, as he took her face between his hands and kissed her, half-shyly still. "Did you sleep last night?" he asked.

"Yes, but I had a horrible dream. I was glad to wake up this morning."

"I did n't sleep, so all my dreams were wakeful ones. You 're not sorry, are you, Rosemary?"

"No, indeed! How could I ever be sorry?"

"You never shall be, if I can help it. I want to be good to you, dear. If I 'm ever otherwise, you 'll tell me so, won't you?"

"Perhaps—I won't promise."

"Why not?"

"Because, even if you were n't good to me, I 'd know you never meant it." Rosemary's eyes were grave and sweet; eloquent, as they were, of her perfect trust in him.

He laughed again. "I 'd be a brute not to be good to you, whether I meant it or not."

"That sounds twisted," she commented, with a smile.

"But it is n't, as long as you know what I mean."

"I 'll always know," sighed Rosemary, blissfully leaning her head against his shoulder. "I 'll always understand and I 'll never fail you. That 's because I love you better than everything else in the world."

"Dear little saint," he murmured; "you 're too good for me."

"No, I 'm not. On the contrary, I 'm not half good enough." Then, after a pause, she asked the old, old question, first always from the lips of the woman beloved: "When did you begin to—care?"

"I must have cared when we first began to come here, only I was so blind I did n't know it."

"When did you—know?"

"Yesterday. I did n't keep it to myself very long."

When Shall It Be?

"Dear yesterday!" she breathed, half regretfully.

"Do you want it back?"

She turned reproachful eyes upon him. "Why should I want yesterday when I have to-day?"

"And to-morrow," he supplemented, "and all the to-morrows to come."

"Together," she said, with a swift realisation of the sweetness underlying the word. "Yesterday was perfect, like a jewel that we can put away and keep. When we want to, we can always go back and look at it."

"No, dear," he returned, soberly; "no one can ever go back to yesterday." Then, with a swift change of mood, he asked: "When shall we be married?"

"Whenever you like," she whispered, her eyes downcast and her colour receding.

"In the Fall, then, when the grapes have been gathered and just before school begins?"

He could scarcely hear her murmured: "Yes."

"I want to take you to town and let you see things. Theatres, concerts, operas, parks, shops, art galleries, everything. If the crop is in early, we should be able to have two weeks. Do you think you could crowd all the lost opportunities of a lifetime into two weeks?"

"Into a day, with you."

He drew her closer. This sort of thing was

very sweet to him, and the girl's dull personality had bloomed like some pale, delicate flower. He saw unfathomed depths in her grey eyes, shining now, with the indescribable light that comes from within. She had been negative and colourless, but now she was a lovely mystery—a half-blown windflower on some brown, bare hillside, where Life, in all its fulness, was yet to come.

"Did you tell your Grandmother and Aunt Matilda?"

"No. How could I?"

"You 'd better not. They 'd only make it hard for you, and I would n't be allowed in the parlour anyway."

Rosemary had not thought of that. It was only that her beautiful secret was too sacred to put into words. "They 'll have to know some time," she temporised.

"Yes, of course, but not until the last minute. The day we 're to be married, you can just put on your hat and say: 'Grandmother, and Aunty, I 'm going out now, to be married to Alden Marsh. I shan't be back, so good-bye."

She laughed, but none the less the idea filled her with consternation. "What will they say!" she exclaimed.

"It does n't matter what they say, as long as you 're not there to hear it."

"Clothes," she said, half to herself. "I can't be married in brown alpaca, can I?"

The Difference

"I don't know why not. We 'll take the fatal step as early as possible in the morning, catch the first train to town, you can shop all the afternoon to your heart's content, and be dressed like a fine lady in time for dinner in the evening."

"Grandmother was married in brown alpaca," she continued, irrelevantly, "and Aunt Matilda wore it the night the minister came to call."

"Did he never come again?"

"No. Do you think it could have been the alpaca?"

"I 'm sure it was n't. Aunt Matilda was foreordained to be an old maid."

"She won't allow anyone to speak of her as an old maid. She says she 's a spinster."

"What 's the difference?"

"I think," returned Rosemary, pensively, "that an old maid is a woman who never could have married and a spinster is merely one who has n't."

"Is it a question of opportunity?"

"I believe so."

"Then you 're wrong, because some of the worst old maids I 've ever known have been married women. I 've seen men, too, who deserve the title."

"Poor Aunt Matilda," Rosemary sighed; "I 'm sorry for her."

"Why?"

Alden's Mother

"Because she has n't anyone to love her—because she has n't you. I 'm sorry for every other woman in the world," she concluded, generously, "because I have you all to myself."

"Sweet," he answered, possessing himself of her hand, "don't forget that you must divide me with mother."

"I won't. Will she care, do you think, because—" Her voice trailed off into an indistinct murmur.

"Of course not. She 's glad. I told her this morning."

"Oh!" cried Rosemary, suddenly tremulous and afraid. "What did she say?"

"She was surprised at first." Alden carefully refrained from saying how much his mother had been surprised and how long it had been before she found herself equal to the occasion.

"Yes—and then?"

"Then she said she was glad; that she wanted me to be happy. She told me that she had always liked you and that the house would n't be so lonely after you came to live with us. Then she asked me to bring you to see her, as soon as you were ready to come."

The full tide overflowed in the girl's heart. She yearned toward Mrs. Marsh with worship, adoration, love. The mother-hunger made her faint with longing for a woman's arms around

Madame's Welcome

her, for a woman's tears of joy to mingle with her own.

"Take me to her," Rosemary pleaded. "Take me now!"

Madame saw them coming and went to the door to meet them. Rosemary was not at all what she had fancied in the way of a daughter-in-law, but, wisely, she determined to make the best of Alden's choice. Something in her stirred in answer to the infinite appeal in the girl's eyes. At the crowning moment of her life, Rosemary stood alone, fatherless, motherless, friendless, with only brown alpaca to take the place of all the pretty things that seem girlhood's right.

Madame smiled, then opened her arms. Without a word, Rosemary went to her, laid her head upon the sweet, silken softness of the old lady's shoulder, and began to cry softly.

"Daughter," whispered Madame, holding her close. "My dear daughter! Please don't!"

Rosemary laughed through her tears, then wiped her eyes. "It's only an April rain," she said. "I'm crying because I'm so happy."

"I wish," responded Madame, gently, with a glance at her son, "that I might be sure all the tears either of you are ever to shed would be tears of joy. It's the bitterness that hurts."

Tears

"Don't be pessimistic, Mother," said Alden, with a little break in his voice. Rosemary's tears woke all his tenderness. He longed to shield and shelter her; to stand, if he might, between her and the thousand pricks and stabs of the world.

"We 'll have tea," Madame went on, brightly, ringing a silver bell as she spoke. "Then we shan't be quite so serious."

"Woman's inevitable solace," Alden observed, lounging about the room with his hands in his pockets. Man-like, he welcomed the change of mood.

"I wonder," he continued, with forced cheerfulness, "why people always cry at weddings and engagements and such things? A husband or wife is the only relative we are permitted to choose—we even have very little to say when it comes to a mother-in-law. With parents, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, and cousins all provided by a generous but sometimes indiscriminating Fate, it seems hard that one's only choice should be made unpleasant by salt water.

"Why," he went on, warming to his subject, "I remember how a certain woman angled industriously for months to capture an unsuspecting young man for her daughter. When she finally landed him, and the ceremony came off to the usual accompaniment of Mendelssohn and a crowded church, I

A Contrast

feared that the bridal couple might have to come down the aisle from the altar in a canoe, on account of the maternal tears."

"Perhaps," suggested Rosemary, timidly, "she was only crying because she was happy."

"If she was as happy as all those tears would indicate, it's a blessed wonder she did n't burst."

Madame smiled fondly at her son as she busied herself with the tea things. Rosemary watched the white, plump hands that moved so gracefully among the cups, and her heart contracted with a swift little pang of envy, of which she was immediately ashamed. Unconsciously, she glanced at her own rough, red hands. Madame saw the look, and understood.

"We'll soon fix them, my dear," she said, kindly. "I 'll show you how to take care of them."

"Really?" cried Rosemary, gratefully. "Oh, thank you! Do you suppose that--that they 'll ever look like yours?"

"Wait and see," Madame temporised. She was fond of saying that it took three generations of breeding to produce the hand of a lady.

The kettle began to sing and the cover danced cheerily. Tiny clouds of steam trailed off into space, disappearing in the late afternoon sunshine like a wraith at dawn. Madame

filled the blue china tea-pot and the subtle fragrance permeated the room.

A Cup of Tea

"Think," she said, as she waited the allotted five minutes for it to steep, "of all I give you in a cup of tea. See the spicy, sunlit fields, where men, women, and children, in little jackets of faded blue, pick it while their queues bob back and forth. Think of all the chatter that goes in with the picking—marriage and birth and death and talk of houses and worldly possessions, and everything else that we speak of here.

"Then the long, sweet drying, and the packing in dim storehouses, and then the long journey. Sand and heat and purple dusk, tinkle of bells and scent of myrrh, the rustle of silks and the gleam of gold. Then the open sea, with infinite spaces of shining blue, and a wake of pearl and silver following the ship. Dreams and moonbeams and starry twilights, from the other side of the world—here, my dear, I give them all to you."

She offered Rosemary the cup as she concluded and the girl smiled back at her happily. This was all so different from the battered metal tea-pot that always stood on the back of the stove at Grandmother's, to be boiled and re-boiled until the colour was gone from the leaves. Alden was looking into his cup with assumed anxiety.

"What's the matter, dear?" asked his mother. "Is n't it right?"

"I was looking for the poem," he laughed, "and I see nothing but a stranger."

"Coming?" she asked, idly.

"Of course. See?"

"You're right—a stranger and trouble. What is there in your cup, Rosemary?"

"Nothing at all," she answered, with a smile, "but a little bit of sugar—just a few grains."

Alden came and looked over her shoulder. Then, with his arm over the back of her chair, he pressed his cheek to hers. "I hope, my dear, that whenever you come to the dregs, you 'll always have that much sweetness left."

Rosemary, flushed and embarrassed, made her adieus awkwardly. "Come again very soon, dear, won't you?" asked Madame.

"Yes, indeed, if I may, and thank you so much. Good-bye, Mrs. Marsh."

"'Mrs. Marsh?'" repeated the old lady, reproachfully. Some memory of her lost Virginia made her very tender toward the motherless girl.

"May I?" Rosemary faltered. "Do you mean it?"

Madame smiled and lifted her beautiful old face. Rosemary stooped and kissed her. "Mother," she said, for the first time in her life. "Dear Mother! Good-bye!"

VII

A Letter and a Guest

An Unexpected Missive

"A LETTER for you, Mother." Alden tossed a violet-scented envelope into the old lady's lap as he spoke, and stood there, waiting.

"For me!" she exclaimed. Letters for either of them were infrequent. She took it up curiously, scrutinised the address, sniffed at the fragrance the missive carried, noted the postmark, which was that of the town near by, and studied the waxen purple seal, stamped with indistinguishable initials.

"I haven't the faintest idea whom it's from," she said, helplessly.

"Why not open it and see?" he suggested, with kindly sarcasm. His assumed carelessness scarcely veiled his own interest in it.

"You always were a bright boy, Alden," she laughed. Another woman might have torn it open rudely, but Madame searched through her old mahogany desk until she found a tarnished silver letter-opener, thus according due courtesy to her unknown correspondent.

Having opened it, she discovered that she

A Woman's Writing

could not read the handwriting, which was angular and involved beyond the power of words to indicate.

"Here," she said. "Your eyes are better than mine."

Alden took it readily. "My eyes may be good," he observed, after a long pause, "but my detective powers are not. The *m's* and *n's* are all alike, and so are most of the other letters. She 's an economical person—she makes the same hieroglyphic do duty for both a *g* and a *y*."

"It 's from a woman, then?"

"Certainly. Did you ever know a man to sprawl a note all over two sheets of paper, with nothing to distinguish the end from the beginning? In the nature of things, you 'd expect her to commence at the top of a sheet, and, in a careless moment, she may have done so. Let me see—yes, here it is: 'My dear Mrs. Marsh.'"

"Go on, please," begged Madame, after a silence. "It was just beginning to be interesting."

"'During my mother's last illness,'" Alden read, with difficulty, "'she told me that if I were ever in trouble, I should go to you—that you would stand in her place to me. I write to ask if I may come, for I can no longer see the path ahead of me, and much less do I know the way in which I should go.

A Schoolmate's Daughter

"'You surely remember her. She was Louise Lane before her marriage to my father, Edward Archer.

"'Please send me a line or two, telling me I may come, if only for a day. Believe me, no woman ever needed a friendly hand to guide her more than

"'Yours unhappily,

"'Edith Archer Lee.'"

"Louise Lane," murmured Madame, reminiscently. "My old schoolmate! I did n't even know that she had a daughter, or that she was dead. How strangely we lose track of one another in this world!"

"Yes?" said Alden, encouragingly.

"Louise was a beautiful girl," continued Madame, half to herself. "She had big brown eyes, with long lashes, a thick, creamy skin that someway reminded you of white rose-petals, and the most glorious red hair you ever saw. She married an actor, and I heard indirectly that she had gone on the stage, then I lost her entirely."

"Yes?" said Alden, again.

"Edith Archer Lee," Madame went on. "She must be married. Think of Louise Lane having a daughter old enough to be married! And yet—my Virginia would have been thirty-two now. Dear me, how the time goes by!"

In Trouble

The tall clock on the landing chimed five deep, musical strokes, the canary hopped restlessly about his gilt cage, and the last light of the sweet Spring afternoon, searching the soft shadows of the room, found the crystal ball on the table and made merry with it.

"Time is still going by," Alden reminded her. "What are you going to do?"

Madame started from her reverie. "Do? Why, she must come, of course!"

"I don't see why," Alden objected, gloomily. "I don't like strange women."

"It is not a question of what we like or don't like, my son," she returned, in gentle reproof. "She is in trouble and she needs something we can give her."

"When people are in trouble, they usually want either money or sympathy, or both."

"Sometimes they only need advice."

"There are lots of places where they can get it. Advice is as free as salvation is said to be."

Madame sighed. Then she crossed the room, and put her hands upon his shoulders. "Dear, are you going to be cross?"

His face softened. "Never to you, if I know it, but why should strange women invade the peace of a man's home? Why should a woman who writes like that come here?"

"Don't blame her for her handwriting—she can't help it."

"I don't blame her; far from it. On the

An Invitation

contrary, I take off my hat to her. A woman who can take a plain pen, and plain ink, and do such dazzling wonders on plain paper, is entitled to sincere respect, if not admiration."

Smiling, Madame went to her desk, and in a quaint, old-fashioned script, wrote a note to Mrs. Lee. "There," she said, as she sealed it. "I 've asked her to come to-morrow on the six o'clock train. I 've told her that you will meet her at the station, and that we won't have dinner until half-past seven. That will give her time to rest and dress. If you 'll take it to the post-office now, she 'll get it in the morning."

Alden shrugged his shoulders good-humouredly, kissed his mother, and went out. He wondered how he would recognise the "strange woman" when she arrived on the morrow, though few people came on the six o'clock train, or, for that matter, on any train.

"Might write her a little note on my own account," he mused. "Ask her to take off her right shoe and hold it in her left hand, or something of that sort. No, that is n't necessary. I 'll bet I could go into a crowd of a thousand women and pick out the one who wrote that letter."

The scent of violet still haunted him, but, by the time he had posted his mother's note, he had forgotten all about it and was thinking of Rosemary.

Planning for the Guest

Madame, however, was busy with plans for her guest's comfort. She took down her best hand-embroidered linen sheets, shaking out the lavender that was laid between the folds, selected her finest towels and dresser-covers, ransacked three or four trunks in the attic for an old picture of Louise Lane, found a frame to fit it, laid out fresh curtains, had the shining silver candlesticks cleaned again, and opened wide every window of the long-unused guest-room to give it a night's airing.

Downstairs, she searched through the preserve-closet for dainties to tempt an unhappy woman's appetite, meanwhile rejoicing with housewifely pride in her well-stocked shelves. That evening, while Alden read the paper, she planned a feast for the next night, and mended, with fairy-like stitches, the fichu of real lace that she usually wore with her lavender silk gown.

"Is it a party?" queried Alden, without looking up from his paper.

"Yes. Is n't company a party?"

"That depends. You know three are said to be a crowd."

"Still inhospitable, dear?"

"Only mildly so. I contemplate the approaching evil with resignation, if not content."

"You and I have lived alone so long that we 've got ourselves into a rut. Everyone

Best Things for Strangers

we meet may give us something, and receive something from us in return."

"I perceive," said Alden, irrelevantly, "that the Lady Mother is going to be dressed in her best when the guest arrives."

A pale pink flush mantled the old lady's fair cheeks. At the moment she looked like a faded rose that had somehow preserved its sweetness.

"Why not?" she asked.

"Why do we always do for strangers what we do not willingly do for our own flesh and blood?" he queried, philosophically. "You love me better than anything else in the world, yet you would n't put on that lavender gown twice a year, just for me alone. The strange woman may feast her eyes upon it the moment she enters the house. She 'll eat from the best china, sleep between embroidered sheets, and, I have no doubt, drink the wine that Father put away the day I was born, to be opened at my wedding."

"Not at your wedding, my son, but the day you found the woman you loved." Then, after a long pause, she added, shyly: "Should n't it be opened now?"

"It 'll keep," the young man grunted. "After lying for thirty years among the cobwebs, a few more weeks or months or years, as the case may be, won't hurt it. Besides, I don't expect to have any wedding. I 'm

Old Wine

merely going to be married. Might as well let the strange woman have it."

Alden's father had, as he said, put away on the day he was born all the wine that was then ready to be bottled. The baby girl had been welcomed gladly, especially as she had her mother's eyes, but the day the second Alden Marsh was born, the young father's joy had known no bounds. He had gone, at dusk, to the pale little mother, and, holding her in his arms, had told her about the wine.

"I 've put it all away," he had said, "for the boy. He 's to open it the day he finds the woman he loves as I love you."

The shelf in the storeroom, where he had placed it, had never been disturbed, though dust and cobwebs lay thickly upon it and Madame had always prided herself upon her immaculate housekeeping. It grieved her inexpressibly because Alden cared so little about it, and had for it, apparently, no sentiment at all. To her it was sacred, like some rare wine laid aside for communion, but, as she reflected, the boy's father had died before he was much more than a child.

"Don't you remember your father at all?" asked Madame, with a sigh.

"I can't say that I do—that is, not before he died." The casket and the gloom of mourning had made its own vivid impression upon the child's sensitive mind. One moment stood

The Passing of the Father

out quite clearly, but he forebore to say so. It was when his mother, with the tears raining down her face, had lifted him in her arms and bade him look at the man who lay in the casket, oh, so cold and still.

"Say good-bye to Father, dear," she had sobbed. "Is Father gone away?" he had asked, in childish terror, then she had strained him to her heart, crying out: "Just for a little while! Oh, if I could only believe it was for just a little while!"

The rest had faded into a mist of sadness that, for a long time, had not even begun to lift. When he found his mother in tears, as he often did after that, he went away quietly, knowing that she longed for "Father," who had gone away and never returned. Later, he used to sit on the top step of the big Colonial porch—a fragile little figure—waiting, through the long Summer afternoons, for the father who did not come.

Once, when his mother was so absorbed in her grief that she did not hear him come into the room, he had laid a timid, trembling hand upon her knee, saying: "Mother, if you will tell me where Father is, I will go and bring him back." But, instead of accepting the offer, she had caught him to her breast, sobbing, with a sudden rush of impassioned prayer: "Dear God, no—not that!"

Time, as always, had done his merciful heal-

Tired and Unhappy

ing, which, though slow, is divinely sure. Madame was smiling, now, at some old memory that had come mysteriously out of the shadow, leaving all bitterness behind. She had finished mending the lace and had laid it aside. Alden took it up, awkwardly, and looked at it.

"This for the strange woman," he said, teasingly, "and plain black or grey silk for me, though I am fain to believe that you love me best. Why is it?"

"Because," she responded, playfully, "you know me and love me, even without fuss and frills. For those who do not know us, we must put our best foot forward, in order to make sure of the attention our real merit deserves."

"But does n't immediately command—is that it?"

"I suppose so."

"What must I wear to the train—my dress suit?"

"Don't be foolish, son. You 'll have plenty of time to dress after you get home."

"Shall I drive, or walk?"

"Take the carriage. She 'll be tired. Unhappy women are always tired."

"Are they tired because they 're unhappy, or unhappy because they 're tired? And do they get unhappier when they get more tired, or do they get more tired when they get unhappier?"

"Don't ask me any more conundrums to-night. I 'm going to bed, to get my beauty sleep."

"You must have had a great many, judging by the results."

Madame smiled as she bent to kiss his rough cheek. "Good-night, my dear. Think of some other pleasant things and say them to-morrow night to Mrs. Lee."

"I 'll be blest if I will," Alden muttered to himself, as his mother lighted a candle and waved her hand prettily in farewell. "If all the distressed daughters of all mother's old schoolmates are coming here, to cry on her shoulder and flood the whole place with salt water, it 's time for me to put up a little tent somewhere and move into it."

By the next day, however, he had forgotten his ill-humour and was at the station fully ten minutes before six o'clock. As it happened, only one woman was among the passengers who left the train at that point.

"Mrs. Lee?" he asked, taking her suit-case from her.

"Yes. Mr. Marsh?"

"Yes. This way, please."

"How did you know me?" she inquired, as she took her place in the worn coupé that had been in the Marsh stables for almost twenty years.

"By your handwriting," he laughed, closing the door.

With Bag and Baggage

A smile hovered for a moment around the corners of her mouth, then disappeared.

"Then, too," he went on, "as you were the only woman who got off the train, and we were expecting you, I took the liberty of speaking to you."

"Did you ask the man to have my trunk sent up?"

"Trunk!" echoed Alden, helplessly. "Why, no! Was there a trunk?"

She laughed—a little, low rippling laugh that had in it an undertone of sadness. There was a peculiar, throaty quality in her voice, like a muted violin or 'cello. "Don't be so frightened, please, for I 'm not going to stay long, really. I 'm merely the sort of woman who can't stay over night anywhere without a lot of baggage."

"It—it was n't that," he murmured.

"Yes, it was. You don't need to tell me polite fibs, you know. How far are we from the house?"

"Not as far," returned Alden, rallying all his forces for one supreme effort of gallantry, "as I wish we were."

She laughed again, began to speak, then relapsed into silence. Furtively, in the gathering shadow, he studied her face. She was pale and cold, the delicate lines of her profile conveyed a certain aloofness of spirit, and her mouth drooped at the corners. Her hat and

veil covered her hair, but she had brown eyes with long lashes. Very long lashes, Alden noted, having looked at them a second time to make sure.

The silence became awkward, but he could think of nothing to say. She had turned her face away from him and was looking out of the window. "How lovely the country is," she said, pensively. "I wish sometimes I never had to step on a pavement again."

"Do you have to?" he asked.

"Yes, for I 'm over-civilised. Like the god in Greek mythology, I need the touch of earth occasionally to renew my strength, but a very brief contact is all-sufficient. I 'm a child of the city, brought up on smoke and noise."

"You don't look it," he said, chiefly because he could think of nothing else to say.

Madame herself opened the door for them, with the old-fashioned hospitality which has an indefinable charm of its own. "How do you do, my dear," she said, taking the hand the younger woman offered her. In the instant of feminine appraisement, she had noted the perfectly tailored black gown, the immaculate shirt-waist and linen collar, and the discerning taste that forbade plumes. The fresh, cool odour of violets persisted all the way upstairs, as Madame chattered along sociably, eager to put the guest at her ease.

Below, they heard Alden giving orders about

Meeting

the trunk, and Mrs. Lee smiled—a little, wan ghost of a smile that Madame misunderstood.

"You don't need to dress, if you're tired," she suggested, kindly, "though we always do. Come down just as you are."

Mrs. Lee turned to the dainty little woman who stood before her, arrayed in shining lavender silk. The real-lace fichu was fastened at the waist with an amethyst pin and at her throat she wore a string of silver beads. Her white hair was beautifully dressed, and somewhere, among the smooth coils and fluffy softness, one caught the gleam of a filigree silver comb.

"Not dress?" she said. "Indeed I shall, as soon as my trunk comes. That is," she added, hastily, "if there's anyone to hook me up."

"There is," Madame assured her. "I'll leave you now to rest. We dine at half-past seven."

The sweetness of the lavender-scented room brought balm to Edith Lee's tired soul. "How lovely she is," she said to herself, as she noted the many thoughtful provisions for her comfort, "and how good it is to be here."

A silver-framed photograph stood on her dressing-table, and she picked it up, wondering who it might be. The hair and gown were old-fashioned, and the face seemed old-fashioned also, but, in a moment, she had recognised her mother.

Tenderness for the dead and the living filled her heart. How dear it was of Madame to have placed it there—this little young mother, just budding into womanhood! It had been taken long before she had known of Edith, or had more than dreamed of love.

The arrival of the trunk compelled her to brush away a few foolish tears. She did not stop to unpack, but only took out the dinner gown that lay on top.

Promptly at half-past seven, she went down into the living-room, where Alden and his mother were waiting to receive her. Madame smiled with pure delight at the vision that greeted her, but the young man forgot his manners and stared—stared like the veriest schoolboy at the tall, stately figure, clad in shimmering pale green satin that rippled about her feet as she walked, brought out a bit of colour in her cheeks and lips, deepened the brown of her eyes, and, like the stalk and leaves of a tiger-lily, faded into utter insignificance before the burnished masses of her red-gold hair.

VIII

"Whom God Hath Joined"

A Fortunate Woman

BREAKFAST had been cleared away and Alden, with evident regret, had gone to school. Madame gave her orders for the day, attended to a bit of dusting which she would trust no one else to do, gathered up the weekly mending and came into the living-room, where the guest sat, idly, robed in a gorgeous negligée of sea-green crêpe which was fully as becoming as her dinner-gown had been the night before.

Madame had observed that Mrs. Lee was one of the rarely fortunate women who look as well in the morning as in the evening. Last night, in the glow of the pink-shaded candles, she had been beautiful, and this morning she was no less lovely, though she sat in direct sunlight that made a halo of her hair.

The thick, creamy skin, a direct legacy from Louise Lane, needed neither powder nor rouge, and the scarlet lips asked for no touch of carmine. But the big brown eyes were wistful beyond words, the dark hollows beneath spoke of sleepless nights, and the corners of the sweet

mouth drooped continually, in spite of valiant efforts to smile.

"I think I should have known you anywhere." Madame began. "You look so much like your mother."

"Thank you. It was dear of you to put her picture on my dressing-table. It seemed like a welcome from her."

Madame asked a few questions about her old schoolmate, receiving monosyllabic answers, then waited. The silence was not awkward, but of that intimate sort which, with women, precedes confidences.

"I suppose you wonder why I came," the younger woman said, after a long pause.

"No," Madame replied, gently, "for you told me in your note that you were troubled and thought I could help you."

"I don't know why I should have thought of you especially, though I have never forgotten what mother told me about coming to you, if I were in trouble, but two or three days ago, it came to me all at once that I was wandering in a maze of darkness and that you could show me the way out."

"I hope I may," the old lady murmured. "I shall be very glad to, if I can. What has gone wrong?"

"Everything," she returned, her brown eyes filling with mist. "Of course it's my husband. It always is, is n't it?"

Running Away

"I don't know why it should be. Is he cruel to you?"

"No, that is, he does n't beat me or anything of that sort. He is n't coarse. But there 's a refined sort of cruelty that hurts worse. I—I could n't bear it any longer, and so I came away."

"Was he willing for you to come?"

"I did n't ask him. I just came."

Madame's glasses dropped from her aristocratic nose in astonishment. "Why, my dear Mrs. Lee! How could you!"

"Edith, please, if you will," she answered, wiping her eyes. Then she laughed bitterly. "Don't be kind to me, for I 'm not used to it and it weakens my armour of self-defence. Tell me I 'm horrid and have done with it."

"Poor child," breathed Madame. "Poor, dear child!"

For a few moments the young woman bit her lips, keeping back the tears by evident effort. Then, having gained her self-control, she went on.

"I 'm twenty-eight, now," she said. "I remember mother used to say she always had her suspicions of a woman who was willing to tell the truth about her age."

"Sounds just like her," commented Madame, taking up a dainty lavender silk stocking that had "run down" from the hem.

"I 've been married six years, but it seems

Marital Troubles

like twenty. Almost from the first, there has been friction between us, but nobody knows it, except you—unless he 's told his friends, and I don't think he 'd do that. We 've both had a preference for doing the family laundry work on the premises."

"What?" queried Madame, missing the allusion.

"Not washing our soiled linen in public," Edith explained. "While I live with my husband as his wife, we stand together before the world as far as it is in my power to manage it. I do not intentionally criticise him to anyone, nor permit anyone to criticise him. I endeavour to look ahead, protect him against his own weakness or folly, and, as far as a woman's tact and thought may do, shield him from the consequences of his own mistakes. I lie for him whenever necessary or even advisable. I have tried to be, for six years, shelter, strength, comfort, courage. And," she concluded bitterly, "I 've failed."

"How so?"

"We live in the same house, but alien and apart. We talk at the table as two strangers might in a crowded restaurant or hotel, that is, when he 's there. I dare not ask people to dinner, for I never know whether he 's coming or not. He might promise faithfully to come, and then appear at midnight, without apology or excuse."

All Sorts of Subterfuges

"He supports you," suggested Madame, glancing at the sea-green crêpe.

"Yes, of course. That is, the question of money has n't arisen between us, one way or another. I have no children, father and mother left me plenty of money, and I don't mind using it in any way that seems advisable. In fact, if I had to, I 'd rather pay the household bills than beg for money, as many a wife is compelled to do—or, for that matter, even ask for it. It is n't as if I had to earn it myself, you know. If I had to, I 'd probably feel differently about it, but, as it is, money does n't matter between us at all.

"Friends of mine," she resumed, "have to resort to all sorts of subterfuges. I know women who bribe the tradespeople to make their bills larger than they should be and give them the difference in cash. I know men who seem to think they do their wives a favour by paying for the food they themselves eat, and by paying their own laundry bills. Then, every once in a while, I see in some magazine an article written by a man who wonders why women prefer to work in shops and factories, rather than to marry. It must be better to get a pay-envelope every Saturday night without question or comment, than it is to humiliate your immortal soul to the dust it arose from, begging a man for money to pay for the dinner he ate last night, or for the price

of a new veil to cover up your last year's hat."

"All this," said Madame, threading her needle again, "is new to me. I live so out of the world, that I know very little of what is going on outside."

"Happy woman! Perhaps I should be happy, also, since this particular phase of the problem does n't concern me. Money may not be your best friend, but it 's the quickest to act, and seems to be favourably recognised in more places than most friends are. For the size of it, a check book is about the greatest convenience I know of."

The brown eyes were cold now, and their soft lights had become a glitter. The scarlet mouth was no longer sweet and womanly, but set into a hard, tight line. Colour burned in her cheeks—not a delicate flush, but the crimson of defiance, of daring. She was, as she sat there, a living challenge to Fate.

"Is he happy?" queried Madame.

"I suppose so. His ideal of a wife seems to be one who shall arrange and order his house, look after his clothing, provide for his material comfort, be there when he comes, sit at the head of his table, dressed in her best, when he deigns to honour dinner with his presence, ask no questions as to his comings or goings, keep still if he prefers to read either the morning or evening paper while he eats, and to refrain

Quiet Rebuke

from annoying him by being ill, or, at least, by speaking of illness.

"I saw, once, a huge cocoa-husk door-mat, with the word 'Welcome' on it in big red letters. I 've been sorry ever since that I did n't buy it, for it typified me so precisely. It would be nice, would n't it, to have at your front door something that exactly indicated the person inside, like the overture to a Wagner opera, using all the themes and *motifs* that were coming? That 's what I 've been for six years, but, if a worm will turn, why not a wife?"

"If you 'll excuse me for saying so," Madame answered, in a tone of quiet rebuke, "I don't think it was quite right to come away without letting him know you were coming."

"Why not?"

"He 'll wonder where you are."

"I 've had plenty of opportunity to wonder where he was."

"But what will he think, when he finds out you have gone?"

"He may not have noticed it. I have competent servants and they 'll look after him as well or better than I do. If I had left a wax figure in the library, in one of my gowns, with its back to the door and its head bent over a book, I could have been well on my way to China before I was missed, or, rather, that I was among those not present. If he has found

it out, it has been by the application of the same inductive methods by which I discover that he 's not coming home to dinner."

Do You Love Him?

"Do you love him?" In the answer to that question lay Madame's solution of all difficulties, past and to come. To her, it was the divine reagent of all Life's complicated chemistry; the swift turning of the prism, with ragged edges breaking the light into the colours of the spectrum, to a point where refraction was impossible.

"I did," Edith sighed, "but marriage is a great strain upon love."

The silvery cadence of Madame's laughter rang through the house and echoed along the corridor. As though in answer, the clock struck ten, the canary sang happily, and a rival melody came from the kitchen, in cracked soprano, mercifully muted by distance and two closed doors.

"See what you 've started," Edith said. "It 's like the poem, where the magic kiss woke the princess, and set all the clocks to going and the little dogs to barking outside. Don't let me talk you to death—I 've been chattering for considerably over an hour, and, very selfishly, of my own affairs, to the exclusion of everything else."

"But your affairs interest me extremely. I wish I knew of some way to help you."

"In the last analysis, of course, it comes to

The Marriage Vow

this—either go on and make the best of it, or quit."

"Not—not divorce," breathed Madame. Her violet eyes were wide with horror.

"No," Edith answered, shortly, "not divorce. Separation, possibly, but not divorce, which is only a legal form permitting one to marry again. Personally, I feel bound by the solemn oath I took at the altar, 'until death do us part,' and 'forsaking all others keep thee only unto me so long as we both shall live.' All the laws in the country could n't make me feel right with my own conscience if I violated that oath."

"If the marriage service were changed," Madame said, nodding her approval, "it might be justified. If one said, at the altar, 'Until death or divorce do us part,' or 'Until I see someone else I like better,' there 'd be reason for it, but, as it is, there is n't. And again, it says, 'Those whom God hath joined let no man put asunder.'"

"Those whom God hath joined no man can put asunder," Edith retorted, "but did God do it? It does n't seem right to blame Him for all the pitiful mistakes that masquerade as marriage. Mother used to say," she resumed, after a little, "that when you 're more miserable without a man than you think you ever could be with him, it 's time to marry him, and when you 're more miserable with him than

you think you ever could be without him, it 's time to quit."

Envious Women.

"And," suggested Madame, "in which class do you belong?"

"Both, I think—that is, I 'm miserable enough to belong to both. I 'm unhappy when he 's with me and wretched when he is n't. As he mostly is n't, I 'm more wretched than unhappy. In the small circle in which I move, I 'm considered a very fortunate woman.

"Women who are compelled to be mendicants and who do not know that I have a private income, envy me my gowns and hats, my ability to ask a friend or two to luncheon if I choose, and the unfailing comfort of a taxicab if I 'm caught in the rain. They think, if they had my gowns and my grooming, that they could win and keep love, which seems to be about all a woman wants. But these things are, in reality, as useless as painting the house when the thermometer is below zero and you need a fire inside to warm your hands by. I have imported gowns and real lace and furs and jewels and all the grooming I 'm willing to take, but my soul is frozen and starved.

"My house," she went on, "is n't a mansion, but it has all the comforts anyone could reasonably require. As far as my taste can discover, it 's artistic and even unusual. The dinner my cook sends up every night is as

The One Thing Lacking

good, or better than any first-class hotel can serve, though it may not be quite so elaborate.

"I myself am not so bad to look at, I am well dressed, and never untidy. I am disgustingly well, which is fortunate, for most men hate a sick woman. If I have a headache I don't speak of it. I neither nag nor fret nor scold, and I even have a few parlour tricks which other people consider attractive. For six years, I have given generously and from a full heart everything he has seemed to require of me.

"I 've striven in every way to please him, adapting myself to his tastes. I 've even been the sort of woman men call 'a good fellow,' admiringly among women and contemptuously among themselves. And, in return, I have nothing—not even the fairy gold that changes to withered leaves when you take it into the sunshine."

"You seem to have a good deal, dear—youth and health and strength and sufficient income. How many women would be glad to have what you have?"

"I want love," cried Edith, piteously. "I want someone to care for me—to be proud of me for what I am and the little things I can do! If I painted a hideous dog on a helpless china plate, I 'd want someone to think it was pretty. If I cooked a mess in the chafing-dish or on the stove, I 'd want someone to think it

was good, just because I did it! If I embroidered a red rose on a pink satin sofa cushion, or painted a Winter scene on a wooden snow-shovel and hung it up in the parlour, I 'd want someone to think it was beautiful. If I wrote a limerick, I 'd want someone to think it was clever. I want appreciation, consideration, sympathy, affection! I 'm starving for love, I 'm dying for it, and I 'd go across the desert on my knees for the man who could give it to me!"

"Perhaps he cares," said Madame, consolingly, "and does n't show it."

"You can tell by the way a man kisses you whether he cares or not. If he does n't kiss you at all, he does n't care and does n' t even mind your knowing it. If he kisses you dutifully, without a trace of feeling, and, by preference, on your cheek or neck, he does n't care but thinks he ought to, and hopes you won't find out that he does n't. But, if he cares —ah, how it thrills you if he cares!"

Madame's violet eyes grew dim. "I know," she said, brokenly, "for I had it all once, long ago. People used to say that marriage changes love, but, with us, it only grew and strengthened. The beginning was no more the fulness of love than an acorn is the oak tree which springs from it. We had our trials, our differences, and our various difficulties, but they meant nothing.

It May Come

"I 've had almost all the experiences of life," she continued, clearing her throat. "The endless cycle of birth and death has passed on its way through me. I 've known poverty, defeat, humiliation, doubt, grief, discouragement, despair. I 've had illness and death; I 've borne children only to lose them again. I 've worked hard and many times I 've had to work alone, but I 've had love, though all I have left of it is a sunken grave."

"And I," answered Edith, "have had everything else but love. Believe me, I 'd take all you 've had, even the grave, if I could have it once."

"It may come," said Madame, hopefully.

Edith shook her head. "That 's what I 'm afraid of."

"How so? Why be afraid?"

"You see," she explained, "I 'm young yet and I 'm not so desperately unattractive as my matrimonial experiences might lead one to believe. I have n't known there was another man on earth except my husband, but his persistent neglect has made me open my eyes a little, and I begin to see others, on a far horizon. Red blood has a way of answering to red blood, whether there are barriers between or not, and if I loved another man, and he were unscrupulous——"

"But," objected the older woman, "you could n't love an unscrupulous man."

Like the Circus

"Could n't I? My dear, when I see the pitiful specimens of manhood that women love, the things they give, the sacrifices they make, the neglect and desertions they suffer from, the countless humiliations they strive to bear proudly, I wonder that any one of us dares to look in the mirror.

"It 's the eternal woman-hunger for love that makes us what we are, compels us to endure what we do, and keeps us all door-mats with 'Welcome' printed on us in red letters. Eagerly trustful, we keep on buying tickets to the circus, and never discover until we 're old and grey, that it 's always exactly the same entertainment, and we 're admitted to it, each time, by a different door.

"Sometimes we see the caged wild animals first, and again, we arrive at the pink-lemonade stand; or, up at the other end, where the trapezes are, or in the middle, opposite the tank. Sometimes the band plays and sometimes it does n't, but all you need in order to be thoroughly disillusioned is to stay to the concert, which bears about the same relation to the circus that marriage does to your anticipations."

"Are you afraid," laughed Madame, "that you 'll buy another ticket?"

"No, but I 'll find it, or somebody will give me a pass. I 'm too young to stay to the concert and there 's more of life coming to me

Mixed Metaphors

still. I only hope and pray that I 'll manage to keep my head and not make the fatal, heart-breaking mistake of the women who go over the precipice, waving defiance at the social law that bids them stay with the herd."

"Your metaphors are mixed," Madame commented. "Concerts and circuses, and herds, and precipices and door-mats. I feel as though you had presented me with a jig-saw puzzle."

"So I have. Is my life anything more than that? I don't even know that all the pieces are there. If they would only print the picture on the cover of the box, or tell us how many pieces there are, and give us more than one or two at a time, and eternity to solve it in, we 'd stand some chance, perhaps."

"More mixed metaphors," Madame said, rolling up the mended stockings.

A maid came into the dining-room and began to set the table for luncheon. Edith rose from her chair and came to Madame. The dark hollows under her eyes were evident now and all the youth was gone from her face and figure.

"Well," she said, in a low tone, "what am I to do?"

It was some little time before Madame answered. "I do not know. These modern times are too confused for me. The old way would have been to wait, to do the best one

Invited to Stay

could, and trust God to make it right in His own good time."

Edith shook her head. "I 've waited and I 've done the best I could, and I 've tried to trust."

"No one can solve a problem for another, but, I think, when it 's time to act, one knows what to do and the way is clearly opened for one to do it. Don't you feel better for having come here and talked to me?"

"Yes, indeed," said the young woman, gratefully. "So much was right—I 'm sure of that. The train had scarcely started before I felt more at peace than I had for years."

"Then, dear, won't you stay with me until you know just what to do?"

Edith looked long and earnestly into the sweet old face. "Do you mean it? It may be a long time."

"I mean it—no matter how long it is."

Quick tears sprang to the brown eyes, and Edith brushed them aside, half ashamed. "It means more trunks," she said, "and your son——"

"Will be delighted to have you with us," Madame concluded.

"Are you sure?"

"Absolutely." Madame was not at all sure, but she told her lie prettily.

"Then," said Edith, with a smile, "I 'll stay."

IX

A Spring Day

Alden's Idea of a Trunk

WITH the tact that seems the birthright of the gifted few, Mrs. Lee adjusted herself to the ways of the Marsh household. Some commotion had been caused by the arrival of four more trunks, of different shapes and sizes, but after they had been unpacked and stored, things went on smoothly.

Alden's idea of a trunk had hitherto been very simple. To him, it was only a substantial box, variation in size and in exterior finish being the only possible diversions from the original type. When it fell to his lot, on a Saturday morning, to superintend the removal of Mrs. Lee's empty trunks to the attic, he discovered the existence of hat trunks, dresser trunks, and wardrobe trunks, cannily constructed with huge warts on all sides but the one the trunk was meant to stand upon.

"Why so scornful?" a sweet voice asked, at his elbow.

"I 'm not scornful," he returned. "I 'm merely interested."

In the hall

"You 're fortunate," she smiled, "to be so easily interested."

"We 're out of the world here, you know, and unfamiliar varieties of the trunk species make me feel much as Crusoe did when he came upon a human footprint in the sand."

"I wonder," mused Mrs. Lee, "how he really did feel. It must have been dramatic beyond all words."

She sat down on the window-seat in the hall and leaned back against the casement of the open window. The warm Spring wind, laden with the sweet scent of growing things, played caressingly about her neck and carried to Alden a subtle fragrance of another sort. Her turquoise-blue silk kimono, delicately embroidered in gold, was open at the throat and fastened at the waist with a heavy golden cord. Below, it opened over a white petticoat that was a mass of filmy lace ruffles. Her tiny feet peeped out beneath the lace, clad in pale blue silk stockings and fascinating Chinese slippers that turned up at the toes.

From above came discordant rumblings and eloquent, but smothered remarks on the general subject of trunks. Mrs. Lee laughed. "They 're trying to make the wardrobe-trunk stand up on the wrong end, and it won't."

"How do you know that 's it?"

"Because I 've heard the same noises and the same general trend of conversation all the

Sounds from the Attic

way from the Atlantic to the Pacific and back again. The farther west you go, the more accomplished the men are in the art of profanity."

"Is it an art? I thought it came naturally."

"It does, to some, but you have no idea what study and constant practice can do in developing a natural gift."

The sunlight illumined her hair into a mass of spun gold that sparkled and gleamed and shone. It made golden lights in her brown eyes, caressed the ivory softness of her skin, and deepened the scarlet of her lips.

"Listen," she said. "Isn't it awful?"

"No," returned Alden, "it isn't. In fact, I don't know of any sound I'd rather hear than your trunks being put into our attic."

A faint suggestion of a dimple appeared at the corner of her mouth, then vanished. "Well done," she said. "You have atoned nobly for your dismay the night I came, when you found I'd brought a trunk."

"I wish you wouldn't," he replied, awkwardly. "It wasn't that."

"Such a small trunk," she went on, mercilessly. "Just a plain little steamer trunk that you can put under a bed. The kind you can ask a cabman to take down to the cab for you. A little trunk that a woman can almost carry herself! Only room for one gown, one hat, and a few toilet articles!"

The golden lights in her eyes were dancing and her hair shimmered in the sun. Alden sat down at the farthest end of the window-seat and looked out upon the vineyard, faintly green, now, with the new leaves. The two men descended from the attic and went down the back stairs.

"How did Robinson Crusoe feel when he saw the footprint?" he asked, determined to get away from the unlucky subject of trunks.

"I don't know," Edith answered, "for I was n't there. He must have been surprised and frightened and pleased all at once. How interesting it must be to have something happen to you that never happened to anybody before!"

"But it 's all happened before," he objected. "Is there anything new under the sun?"

"It 's been new, at one time or another. We 're always too late, that 's all. Somebody ate the first oyster and somebody went to sleep first and somebody wore the first false hair.

"No," she continued, with a rose-pink flush mantling her face, "I don't. If I did, I would n't mind saying so, but Nature gave me quantities of it, so why should I borrow more? Besides, I don't believe there is any more like it, so I could n't, anyway."

"No," he returned, thoughtfully, "I don't believe there is any more like it, either. Your wish to be first in something is surely gratified,

Red hair and Auburn

for there never was such hair as yours and never will be again."

"Mother's was like it."

He shook his head. "No, it was n't. I never saw your mother, but I know better than that."

"Ask your mother. There she is now."

Madame appeared at the head of the stairs, on the way to her room, to dress for luncheon. She paused to smile at the two who sat on the window-seat, then would have gone straight on had not Edith called to her.

"Mrs. Marsh! Is n't my hair exactly like my mother's?"

Madame came to her, turned the shining head a little more toward the sun, and patted the fluffiness caressingly. "No," she said, "though your mother had glorious hair, it was nothing like this. Hers was auburn and smooth, yours is reddish-gold—almost copper-coloured—and fluffy. Besides, you must have nearly twice as much of it."

"There," said Alden, "I told you so."

"But," persisted Edith, "if it 's really copper-coloured, it 's common. Look at the lady on the copper cent, for instance."

"The lady on the copper cent," returned Alden, "is a gentleman who wears feathers."

"But under his feathers he has hair the colour of this."

"He may not have any hair at all."

They both laughed, and Madame smiled, though she did not quite understand what they were talking about. She was still smiling when she reached her own room, for she found it very pleasant to have Edith there, and was delighted to have Alden come to a realising sense of his duties as host.

What's the Matter with Her?

He had, indeed, conducted himself admirably ever since Mrs. Lee's arrival, though he had been very quiet and reserved at first. With some trepidation, she had told him that she had invited the guest to remain indefinitely, tactfully choosing a moment after an unusually good dinner, when they chanced to be alone.

Alden had taken it calmly, betraying no outward sign of any sort of emotion. "What 's the matter with her?" he had asked, curiously. "What 's she in trouble about?"

"If she wants you to know, my son, she will tell you herself," Madame had replied, in a tone of gentle rebuke. "I have no right to violate her confidence."

He shrugged his shoulders good-humouredly. "You don't need to squelch me like that, Mother. I don't know that I care, particularly. I was merely making conversation."

"Refined conversation is not made of impertinences," Madame suggested. The words were harsh, but the tone was kind.

"Don't stab me with epigrams, please, for I don't believe I deserve it."

Dream-Children

Madame recalled every word they had said as she took down her afternoon gown of black silk, and began to sew frills of real lace in the neck and sleeves. She was glad he had been pleasant about it, for it seemed much more like living, someway, to have another woman in the house.

If Virginia had lived—she, too, had brown eyes, but her hair was brown also. She would have been four years older than Edith was now, and, undoubtedly, married. All Madame's feminine ancestors for generations back had been married. The only spinster in the family, so far as Madame knew, had remained true to the memory of a dead lover.

"Some women are born to be married, some achieve marriage, and others have marriage thrust upon them," Madame said to herself, unconsciously paraphrasing an old saying. Virginia would have been meant for it, too, and, by now, there would have been children in the old house, pattering back and forth upon the stairs, lisping words that meant no more than the bubbling of a fountain, and stretching up tiny hands that looked like crumpled rose-petals, pleading to be taken up and loved.

These dream-children tugged strangely at the old lady's heart-strings in her moments of reverie. Even yet, after Rosemary came—but they would not be like her own flesh and blood, as a daughter's children always are.

"Fussed Over"

Poor Rosemary! How miserable she was at home, and how little she would need to make her happy! To think that she dared not tell her Grandmother and Aunt that she was engaged to Alden! Madame's cheeks grew warm with resentment in the girl's behalf. Motherless, friendless, alone, with Life's great cup of wonder in her rough, red hands!

A tap at the door made her start. "Come in!" she called.

It was Edith, trig and tailor-made, in dark green, with a crisp white linen shirtwaist, an immaculate collar, and a dashing green tie.

"Mr. Marsh has invited me to go for a drive after luncheon," she said, "and he asked me to come and see if you were n't almost ready. May I do your hair for you?"

Madame submitted, not because she cared to have her hair done, but because she liked to be "fussed over," as she put it. There was something very pleasant in the touch of Edith's cool, soft hands.

"You 're—you 're not going to change the way I do it, are you?" she asked, a little anxiously.

"No, indeed! I would n't change it for anything. It suits you just as it is."

"I 'm glad you think so, for I 've always worn it like this. Alden would n't know me if I became fashionable."

It Is n't Right

"He does n't look a bit like you," said Edith, irrelevantly.

"No, but he 's the living image of his father, and I 'm very glad. It keeps me from—from missing him too much." Madame's voice broke a little on the last words.

"It must be lovely to be missed," said Edith, quickly. "Now I——"

"Dear, have n't you told him yet?"

"He 's probably discovered it by this time. Still, I don't know—I 've only been away a week."

"It is n't right," said Madame, decidedly. "You must let him know where you are."

"Why? I never know where he is."

"That does n't make any difference. Two wrongs never make one perfect right. If you do your part, things will be only half wrong, instead of entirely so."

"I 'll do whatever you think best," said Edith, humbly. "I came to you because I could think for myself no longer. I 'll write him a note before luncheon, if you say so, and post it this afternoon."

"I do say so."

Therefore luncheon waited for a few moments, to Alden's secret impatience, until Edith came down with her note. She offered it to Madame, doubtfully. "Want to see it?"

"No, dear. I 'll trust you."

She sealed it with shamefaced gladness that

On the Way to the Post-Office

Madame had not availed herself of the opportunity. She was quite sure that her counsellor would not approve of the few formal lines which were all she had been able to make herself write.

After luncheon, when Alden assisted her into Madame's decrepit phaeton, and urged the superannuated horse into a wildly exciting pace of three miles an hour, she asked to be driven to the post-office.

"Thank you," said Alden, "for alluding to it as a drive. It 's more like a walk."

"It is n't exactly like going out in a touring car," she admitted, "but it 's very pleasant, nevertheless. It gives you time to look at the scenery."

"Also to photograph it if you should so desire. You don't even need to limit yourself to snap-shots. A time-exposure is altogether possible."

When they reached the post-office, Alden took her note, and went through the formality of tying the horse. He glanced at the superscription, not because he was interested in her unknown correspondent, but because the handwriting claimed his attention. Through the delicate angular tracery he made out the address: "Mr. William G. Lee." The street and number were beyond his skill in the brief time he had at his command.

"So," he said, when he came back, "you 're

Mrs. William G.

Mrs. William G. I trust you don't call him 'William'?"

"No—he 's the sort of William who is always known as 'Billy.' "

"Good! That speaks well for him."

Alden began to wonder, as he alternately coaxed and threatened the horse toward the river-road, what manner of man she had married. Someone, undoubtedly, with the face and figure of Apollo, the courtesy of Chesterfield, and the character of a saint. "It was good of him," he said, gratefully, "to let you come to us."

Edith bit her lips and turned her face away. "I was glad to come," she answered, after a pause. For a moment she trembled upon the verge of a confidence, then summoned all her conversational powers to the rescue.

She began with the natural beauty of the country through which they were driving, observed that the roads were better adapted to a horse than to an automobile, noted the pleasant situation of the Marsh house on the river shore, veered for a moment to the subject of good roads in France, came back to the blue reflection of the sky upon the smooth surface of the river, admired the situation of the vineyard, said that Madame's phaeton was extremely comfortable, and concluded by asking if it was n't almost time for apple-blossoms.

"I Just Knew!"

"All of which means," said Alden, quietly, "that you 're unhappily married."

"How do you know?" demanded Edith, crimson with surprise and mortification. "Did —did your mother tell you?"

"No, she did n't—most decidedly she did n't. I just know, that 's all."

"How? Do I betray myself so completely as that?"

He answered her question by another. "How did you know, the night you came, that I was surprised and not altogether pleased by the fact that you had brought a trunk? Were my manners as bad as all that?"

"Why, no—I just knew."

"And how did you know, this morning, when we were sitting on the window-seat, that I was wondering whether or not you wore false hair?"

"Why—I just knew."

"That 's it, exactly."

"How long have you—known?"

"Ask me something easier than that," he laughed, endeavouring to relieve a situation that threatened to become awkward. Following his lead, she began to ask questions about the vineyard, and, when he told her he feared he knew very little about his work, suggested that he should read up on vine-culture and make it the best-paying vineyard in the State.

An Afternoon Drive

"Has mother been talking to you?" he demanded, turning to her quickly.

"About the vineyard? No. But, if it's your work, why not do it better than anybody else does it?"

Alden looked at her long and earnestly. The golden lights of her eyes were thrown into shadow now, for it was afternoon and they were driving east. Her answering smile gave him confidence, courage. Moreover, it challenged him in some subtle way he could not analyse. It dared him, as it were, to make the best of the vineyard—and himself.

"Thank you," he said, at length. "I believe—I will."

The divine moment passed, and, for the remainder of the drive, they talked commonplaces. But the fresh air from the hills, the freedom of the wind-swept spaces, the steady aspiration of everything that lived, brought the colour to Edith's cheeks, the sparkle to her eyes, and ministered secretly to her soul. When she went in, she looked happier than she had since she came. Madame saw it and was glad, but wisely said nothing.

She came down at dinner-time in a black lace gown trimmed with spangles that glittered when she moved. It was cut away slightly from the rounded, ivory throat, and the white arms were bare to the elbow. The upper parts of the sleeves were made of black velvet ribbon,

A Sense of Foreboding

latticed into small diamond-shaped openings through which the satin texture of the skin showed in the candlelight. She wore no rings, except the slender circlet of gold that had been put on her finger at the altar, six years ago.

Conversation at dinner proceeded slowly, but on pleasant lines. Edith seemed preoccupied, and, at times, Alden relapsed into long silences. Madame noted that they scarcely spoke to each other, and was vaguely troubled, for she liked Edith, and wanted Alden to like her too.

After dinner, Edith played cribbage with Madame and Alden read the paper. When Madame had won three games, in rapid succession, Edith said good-night. Alden, from the depths of his paper, murmured the conventional response.

That night he started from his sleep with a sense of foreboding. He sat up and listened, but there was no sound. Not even the wind moving a shutter, nor a swaying branch tapping at his window—not a footfall, nor an echo, nor a breath.

The tall clock on the landing struck four. The silvery strokes died away into a silence that was positive, rather than negative. The sense of foreboding still persisted; moreover, he was conscious that someone else was awake also.

A Mysterious Perception

Was it his mother? Was she ill? No—he was sure of that. Was it Edith? Yes, that was it. She was awake, and had been awake all night. Moreover, she was crying.

His heart throbbed with tender pity. He yearned to comfort her, to assure her that whatever was wrong must eventually be made right. Why, from the crown of her beautiful head to the turned-up toe of her blue Chinese slipper, Edith had been made for joy—and for love.

Out of the darkness came a sudden mysterious perception. She knew she had awakened him, and had smiled at the knowledge. A sense of weariness quickly followed, then a restful silence which carried no thought with it.

He lay back on his pillow and waited, with his eyes closed, until he felt that she was asleep. Then he slept also.

X

A Little Brown Mouse

A Letter for Rosemary

ROSEMARY peered into the letter box and saw that *The Household Guardian* was there. On one Thursday it had failed to appear and she had been unable to convince Grandmother of her entire innocence in the matter. Even on the following day, when she brought it home, in the original wrapping, she felt herself regarded with secret suspicion. As it never had failed to come on Thursday, why should it, unless Rosemary, for some reason best known to herself, had tampered with the United States Mail?

There was also a letter, and Rosemary waited eagerly for the postmaster to finish weighing out two pounds of brown sugar and five cents' worth of tea for old Mrs. Simms. She pressed her nose to the glass, and squinted, but the address eluded her. Still, she was sure it was for her, and, very probably, from Alden, whom she had not seen for ten days.

She felt a crushing sense of disappointment when she saw that it was not from Alden, but

Ways and Means

was addressed in an unfamiliar hand. Regardless of the deference she was accustomed to accord a letter, she tore it open hastily and read:

"My Dear Rosemary:

"Can you come to tea on Saturday afternoon about four? We have a guest whom I am sure you would like to meet.

"Affectionately, your

"Mother."

The words were formal enough, and the quaint stateliness of the handwriting conveyed its own message of reserve and distance but the signature thrilled her through and through. "Mother!" she repeated, in a whisper. She went out of the post-office blindly, with the precious missive tightly clasped in her trembling hand.

Would she go? Of course she would, even though it meant facing Grandmother, Aunt Matilda, and all the dogs of war.

As the first impulse faded, she became more cautious, and began to consider ways and means. It was obviously impossible to wear brown gingham or brown alpaca to a tea-party. That meant that she must somehow get her old white muslin down from the attic, iron it, mend it, and freshen it up as best she could. She had no doubt of her

Secret Longings

ability to do it, for both old ladies were sound sleepers, and Rosemary had learned to step lightly, in bare feet, upon secret errands around the house at night.

But how could she hope to escape, unobserved, on Saturday afternoon? And, even if she managed to get away, what of the inevitable return? Why not, for once, make a bold declaration of independence, and say, calmly: "Grandmother, I am going to Mrs. Marsh's Saturday afternoon at four, and I am going to wear my white dress." Not "May I go?" or "May I wear it?" but "I am going," and "I am going to wear it."

At the thought Rosemary shuddered and her soul quailed within her. She knew that she would never dare to do it. At the critical moment her courage would fail her, and she would stay at home. Perhaps she could wear the brown gingham if it were fresh and clean, and she pinned at her throat a bow of the faded pink ribbon she had found in her mother's trunk in the attic. And, if it should happen to rain Saturday, or even look like rain, so much the better. Anyhow, she would go, even in the brown gingham. So much she decided upon.

Yet, with all her heart, she longed for the white dress, the only thing she had which even approached daintiness. An old saying came back to her in which she had found consola-

A Bit of News

tion many times before. "When an insurmountable obstacle presents itself, sometimes there is a way around it." And, again, "Take one step forward whenever there is a foothold and trust to God for the next."

That night, at supper, Aunt Matilda electrified Grandmother with a bit of news which she had jealously kept to herself all day.

"The milkman was telling me," she remarked, with an assumed carelessness which deceived no one, "that there 's company up to Marshs'."

Grandmother dropped her knife and fork with a sharp clatter. "You don't tell me!" she cried. "Who in creation is it?"

"I was minded to tell you before," Aunt Matilda resumed, with tantalising deliberation, "but you 've had your nose in that fool paper all day, and whenever I spoke to you you told me not to interrupt. Literary folks is terrible afraid of bein' interrupted, I 've heard, so I let you alone."

"I did n't know it was anything important," murmured Grandmother, apologetically.

"How could you know," questioned Matilda, logically, "before I 'd told you what it was?"

There being no ready answer to this, Grandmother responded with a snort, which meant much or little, as one might choose. A dull red burned on her withered cheeks and she had

A Play-Actin' Person

lost interest in her supper. Only Rosemary was calm.

"As I was sayin'," Matilda went on, after an aggravating silence, "there 's company up to Marshs'."

"Seems to me," Grandmother grunted, "that she 'd better be payin' up the calls she owes in the neighbourhood than entertainin' strangers." This shaft pierced a vulnerable spot in Matilda's armour of self-esteem, for she still smarted under Madame Marsh's neglect.

"The milkman says it 's a woman. Her name 's Mis' Lee. She come a week ago and last Saturday she was to the post-office, and up the river-road all the afternoon in that old phaeton with young Marsh."

Rosemary's heart paused for a moment, then resumed its beat.

"She 's a play-actin' person, he says, or at any rate she looks like one, which amounts to the same thing. She 's brought four trunks with her—one respectable trunk, same as anybody might have, one big square trunk that looks like a dog-house, and another big trunk that a person could move into if there was n't no other house handy, and another trunk that was packed so full that it had bulged out on all sides but one, and when Jim and Dick took it up into the attic there was n't but one side they could set it on. And whiles they was

Servant's Gossip

findin' a place to set it, she and young Marsh was laughin' down in the hall."

"Who is she?" demanded Grandmother. "Where did she come from? How long is she goin' to stay? Where 'd Mis' Marsh get to know her?"

"The milkman's wife was over last Monday," Matilda continued, "to help with the washin', and she says she never see such clothes in all her born days nor so many of 'em. They was mostly lace, and she had two white petticoats in the wash. The stockin's was all silk, and she said she never see such nightgowns. They was fine enough for best summer dresses, and all lace, and one of 'em had a blue satin bow on it, and what was strangest of all was that there wa' n't no place to get into 'em. They was made just like stockin's with no feet to 'em, and if she wore 'em, she 'd have to crawl in, either at the bottom or the top. She said she never see the beat of those nightgowns."

"Do tell!" ejaculated Grandmother.

"And her hair looks as if she ain't never combed it since the day she was born. The milkman says it looks about like a hen's nest and is pretty much the same colour. He see her on the porch for a minute, and all he could look at was that hair. And when he passed 'em on the river-road after they come from the post-office, he could n't see her hair at all,

Discussing the Stranger

cause she had on a big hat tied on with some thin light blue stuff. He reckoned maybe her hair was a wig."

"I 'd know whether 't was a wig or not, if I saw it once," Grandmother muttered. "There ain't nobody that can fool me about false hair."

"I guess you ain't likely to see it," retorted Matilda, viciously. "All we 'll ever hear about her 'll be from the milk folks."

"Maybe I could see her," ventured Rosemary, cautiously. "I could put on my best white dress and go to see Mrs. Marsh, tomorrow or next day, after I get the work done up. I could find out who she was and all about her, and come back and tell you."

For an instant the stillness was intense, then both women turned to her. "You!" they said, scornfully, in the same breath.

"Yes," said Grandmother, after an impressive pause, "I reckon you 'll be puttin' on your best dress and goin' up to Marshs' to see a play-actin' woman."

"You 'd have lots to do," continued Aunt Matilda, "goin' to see a woman what ain't seen fit to return a call your Aunt made on her more 'n five years ago."

"Humph!" Grandmother snorted.

"The very idea," exclaimed Aunt Matilda.

What had seemed to Rosemary like an open path had merely led to an insurmountable

One Step Forward

stone wall. She shrugged her shoulders good-humouredly. "Very well," she said, "I 'm sure I don't care. Suit yourselves."

She began to clear away the supper dishes, for, though the others had eaten little, they had apparently finished. Out in the kitchen, she sang as she worked, and only a close observer would have detected a tremor in the sweet, untrained soprano. "Anyway," thought Rosemary, "I 'll put on the flat-irons."

The fire she had built would not go out for some hours. She had used coal ruinously in order to heat the oven for a special sort of tea-biscuit of which Grandmother was very fond. While the fire was going out, it would heat the irons, and then——

"One step forward whenever there is a foothold," she said to herself, "and trust to God for the next."

That night, as fortune would have it, Grandmother and Aunt Matilda elected to sit up late, solving a puzzle in *The Household Guardian* for which a Mission rocker was offered as a prize. It was long past ten o'clock when they gave it up.

"I dunno," yawned Aunt Matilda, "as I 'm partial to rockers."

"Leastways," continued Grandmother, rising to put her spectacles on the mantel, "to the kind they give missionaries. I 've seen

the things they send missionaries more 'n once, in my time."

By eleven, the household slept, except Rosemary. As silently as a ghost, she made her way to the attic, brought down the clean white muslin, and, with irons scarcely hot enough, pressed it into some semblance of freshness. She hung it in her closet, under the brown alpaca of two seasons past, and went to sleep, peacefully.

Bright and early the next morning the Idea presented itself. Why not put on the white gown with one of the brown ones over it and take off the brown one when she got there? Mrs. Marsh would understand.

Rosemary laughed happily as she climbed out of bed. Surely there was more than one way of cheating Fate! That afternoon, while the others took their accustomed "forty winks," she brought down the faded pink ribbon that had been her mother's. That night she discovered that neither of the brown ginghams would go over the white muslin, as they had shrunk when they were washed, but that the alpaca would. There was not even a bit of white showing beneath the skirt, as she had discovered by tilting her mirror perilously forward.

She was up early Saturday morning, and baked and swept and dusted to such good purpose that, by three o'clock, there was nothing

Hung in the Balance

more that anyone could think of for her to do until it was time to get supper. She had put the white gown on under the alpaca when she dressed in the morning, as it was the only opportunity of which she was at all sure.

Grandmother and Aunt Matilda were nodding in their chairs. The kitchen clock struck the half hour. Finally, Rosemary spoke.

"Is there anything either of you would like me to get at the store?"

"No," said Grandmother.

"No," echoed Aunt Matilda. Then she added: "Why? Were you thinkin' of goin' out?"

"I thought I would," said Rosemary, with a yawn, "if there was nothing more for me to do. It's such a nice day, and I'd like a breath of fresh air."

For a moment, Fate hung in the balance, then Grandmother said, generously: "Go on, Rosemary, and get all the fresh air you want. You've worked better'n common to-day."

"I should think you'd be tired enough to stay home and rest," Aunt Matilda commented, fretfully, but the door had closed on the last word, and Rosemary was gone.

"But April's sun strikes down the glades to-day;
So shut your eyes upturned, and feel my kiss
Creep, as the Spring now thrills through every spray
Up your warm throat to your warm lips—"

The beautiful words sang themselves through her memory as she sped on. She had forgotten about the guest for the moment, remembering with joy that almost hurt, the one word "Mother," and the greater, probable joy that overshadowed it. Of course he would be there! Why not, when he knew she was coming to tea—and when they had a guest, too? The girl's heart beat tumultuously as she neared the house, for through it, in great tides, surged fear, and ecstasy—and love.

Madame herself opened the door. "Come in, dear!"

"Oh, Mrs. Marsh! Please, just a minute!"

"Mrs. Marsh again? I thought we were mother and daughter. Edith!" she called. Then, in the next moment, Rosemary found herself in the living-room, offering a rough, red hand to an exquisite creature who seemed a blurred mass of pale green and burnished gold, redolent of violets, and who murmured, in a beautifully modulated contralto: "How do you do, Miss Starr! I am very glad to meet you."

The consciousness of the white gown underneath filled Rosemary's eyes with tears of mortification, which Madame hastened to explain. "It 's raw and cold still," she said, "in spite of the calendar. These keen Spring winds make one's eyes water. Here, my dear, have a cup of tea."

An Uncomfortable Afternoon

Rosemary took the cup with hands that trembled, and, while she sipped the amber fragrance of it, struggled hard for self-possession. Madame ignored her for the moment and chatted pleasantly with Edith. Then Alden came in and shook hands kindly with Rosemary, though he had been secretly annoyed when he learned she was coming. Afterward, he had a bad quarter of an hour with himself while he endeavoured to find out why. At last he had shifted the blame to Edith, deciding that she would think Rosemary awkward and countrified, and that it would not be pleasant for him to stand by and see it.

However, the most carping critic could have found no fault with Edith's manner. If she felt any superiority, she did not show it. She accorded to Rosemary the same perfect courtesy she showed Madame, and, apparently, failed to notice that the girl had not spoken since the moment of introduction.

She confined the conversation wholly to things Rosemary must have been familiar with—the country, the cool winds that sometimes came when one thought it was almost Summer, the perfect blend of Madame's tea, the quaint Chinese pot, and the bad manners of the canary, who seemed to take a fiendish delight in scattering the seed that was given him to eat.

Looking into the Crystal Ball

Rosemary merely sat in the corner, tried to smile, and said, as required, "Yes," or "No." Alden, pitying her from the depths of his heart and yet secretly ashamed, tried unsuccessfully, now and then, to draw her into the conversation.

Edith drained her cup, affected disappointment at finding no stray leaves by which she might divine the future, then went to Rosemary, and took the empty cup which she sat holding with pathetic awkwardness.

"You have none, either, Miss Starr," she said, sweetly. "Suppose we try the crystal ball? I 've been wanting to do it ever since I came, but was afraid to venture, alone."

Rosemary, her senses whirling, followed her over to the table, where the ball lay on its bit of black velvet.

"How do you do it?" asked Edith, of Madame.

"Just get into a good light, shade your eyes, and look in."

"That 's easy," Edith said. She bent over the table, shaded her eyes with her white, beautifully-kept hands, and peered into the crystalline depths. "There 's nothing here," she continued, somewhat fretfully, to Alden, "except you. By some trick of reflection, I could see you as plainly as though it were a mirror. You try, Miss Starr."

Madame's heart contracted suddenly as she

A Black Cloud

remembered the day she had looked into the crystal ball, and had seen not only Alden, but a woman with flaming red hair, clasped closely in his arms. "It 's all nonsense," she tried to say, but her stiff lips would not move.

Rosemary left the table and went back to her corner. "What did you see?" queried Edith. "Did you have any better luck than I did?"

"No," Rosemary answered, with a degree more of self-possession than she had shown previously. "There was nothing there but a black cloud."

The task of keeping up the conversation fell to Edith and Alden, for Madame had unconsciously withdrawn into herself as some small animals shut themselves into their shells. All were relieved, though insensibly, when Rosemary said she must go.

Alden went into the hall with her, to help her with her coat and hat, and, as opportunity offered, to kiss her twice, shyly, on her cheek. He wanted to go part way home with her, but Rosemary refused.

"You 'd better not," she said, "but thank you just as much."

"Won't you even let me go to the corner with you?"

"No," said Rosemary, with trembling lips, "please don't."

So she went on alone, while Alden returned

to the living-room. Edith was saying to Madame: "Poor little brown mouse! How one longs to take a girl like that and give her all the pretty things she needs!"

Edith's Desire for Rosemary

Madame took the crystal ball, wrapped it in its bit of velvet, and put it on the highest shelf of the bookcase, rolling it back behind the books, out of sight.

"Why do you do that, Mother?" asked Alden, curiously. "Because," returned Madame, grimly, "it 's all nonsense. I won't have it around any more."

Alden laughed, but Edith went on, thoughtfully: "I 'd like to do her hair for her, and see that all her under-things were right, and then put her into a crêpe gown of dull blue—a sort of Chinese blue, with a great deal of deep-toned lace for trimming, and give her a topaz pendant set in dull silver, and a big picture hat of ecru net, with a good deal of the lace on it, and one long plume, a little lighter than the gown."

"I would, too," said Alden, smiling at Edith. He did not in the least know what she was talking about, but he knew that she felt kindly toward Rosemary, and was grateful for it.

Rosemary, at home, went about her duties mechanically. There was a far-away look in her eyes which did not escape the notice of Grandmother and Aunt Matilda, but they

Heart-burns

forebore to comment upon it as long as she performed her tasks acceptably. At supper she ate very little, and that little was as dust and ashes in her mouth.

Before her, continually, was a heart-breaking contrast. She, awkward, ugly, ill at ease in brown alpaca made according to the fashion of ten or fifteen years ago, and Mrs. Lee, beautiful, exquisite, dainty to her finger-tips, richly dowered with every conceivable thing that she herself lacked.

"Mother," said Rosemary, to herself. "Oh, Mother!" She did not mean Mrs. Marsh, but the pretty, girlish mother who had died in giving birth to her. She would have been like Mrs. Lee, or prettier, and she would have understood.

Her heart smarted and burned and ached, but she got through the evening somehow, and, at the appointed time, stumbled up to her own room.

Why should she care because another woman was prettier than she, knew more, and had more? Were there not many such in the world, and had she not Alden? Accidentally, Rosemary came upon the cause of her pain.

Of course she had Alden, for always—unless—then, once more, reassurance came. "She 's married," said Rosemary, smiling back at the white, frightened face she saw in the mirror. "She 's married!"

The thought carried with it so much comfort that presently Rosemary slept peacefully, exhausted, as she was, by the stress of the afternoon. "She 's married," was her last conscious thought, and a smile lingered upon her lips as she slept. She had not enough worldly wisdom to know that, other things being equal, a married woman may be a dangerous rival, having the unholy charm of the unattainable, and the sanction of another man's choice.

The Comforting Thought

XI

The Hour of the Turning Night

Awake in the Night

THE darkness was vibrant, keen, alive. It throbbed with consciousness, with mysterious fibres of communication. There was no sense of a presence in the room, nor even the possibility of a presence. It was vague, abstract, yet curiously definite.

Edith woke from a troubled dream with a start. For a moment she lay quietly and listened, not afraid, but interested, as though upon the threshold of some new experience. The scurrying feet of mice made a ghostly patter in the attic, above her room, and a vagrant wind, in passing, tapped at her window with the fairy-like fingers of the vine that clung to the wall.

Otherwise all was still, and yet the darkness trembled with expectancy. Something hitherto unknown seemed to have entered her consciousness, some thought, emotion, instinct, or what? Wide awake, staring into space, she lay there, wondering, waiting, not in the least frightened, but assured of shelter and of peace.

Another Personality

Gradually she had lost consciousness of her body. She had relaxed completely and her mind soared, free. She moved one foot, cautiously, to see whether her body was still there, and smiled when she was reassured by the cool smoothness of the linen sheet, and the other warm little foot she touched in moving.

Somewhere, in this same darkness, was another personality. Of so much she eventually became sure. It was not in the room, perhaps not even in the house, but for someone else, somewhere, was this same sense—of communication? No, but rather the possibility of it.

Someone else had also lost consciousness of the body. Another mind, released for the moment from its earthly prison, sought communion with hers. Was this death, and had she wakened in another world? She moved her foot again, pressed her hand to the warm softness of her breast, felt her breath come and go, and even the steady beating of her heart. Not death, then, only a pause, in which for once the body, clamorous and imperious with its thousand needs, had given way to the soul.

The curious sense of another personality persisted. Was this other person dead, and striving mutely for expression? No, surely not, for this other mind was on the same plane as hers, subject to the same conditions. Not

A New Self

disembodied entirely, but only relaxed, as she was, this other personality had wakened and found itself gloriously free.

A perception of fineness followed. Not everyone was capable of this, and the conviction brought a pleasant sense of superiority. Above the sordid world, in some higher realm of space and thought, they two had met, and saluted one another.

For the first time Edith thought of her body as something separate from herself, and in the light of a necessary—or unnecessary—evil. This new self neither hungered nor thirsted nor grew weary; it knew neither cold nor heat nor illness; pain, like a fourth dimension, was out of its comprehension, it required neither clothes nor means of transportation, it simply went, as the wind might, by its own power, when and where it chose.

Whose mind was it? Was it someone she knew, or someone she was yet to meet? And in what bodily semblance did it dwell, when it was housed in its prison? Was it a woman, or a man? Not a woman—Edith instantly dismissed the idea, for this sense of another personality carried with it not the feeling of duality or likeness, but of difference, of divine completion.

Some man she knew, or whom she was to know, freed for the moment from his earthly environment, roamed celestial ways with her.

She was certain that it was not lasting, that, at the best, it could be of very brief duration, and this fact of impermanence was the very essence of its charm, like life itself.

Who Was the Man?

The clock downstairs began to strike—one, two, three—four. It was the hour of the night when life is at its lowest, the point on the flaming arc of human existence where it touches the shadow of the unknown, softening into death or brightening into life according to the swing of the pendulum. Then, if ever, the mind and body would be apart, Edith thought, for when the physical forces sink, the spirit must rise to keep the balance true.

Who was the man? Her husband? No, for they were too far apart to meet like this. She idly went over the list of her men acquaintances—old schoolmates, friends of her husband's, husbands of her friends, as one might call the roll of an assembly, expecting someone to rise and answer "Here."

Yet it was all in vain, though she felt herself on the right track and approaching a definite solution. The darkness clung about her like a living thing. It throbbed as the air may when a wireless instrument answers another, leagues away; it was as eloquent of communication as a network of telephone and telegraph wires, submerged in midnight, yet laden with portent of life and death.

She sat up in bed, straining every nerve

The Answer

to the point where all senses unite in one. "Who are you?" Her lips did not move, but the thought seemed to have the sound of thunder in its imperious demand. Tangled fibres of communication noiselessly wove themselves through the darkness, and again all her soul merged itself into one question—"Who? For God's sake, who?"

Then, after a tense instant of waiting, the answer flashed upon her, vivid as lightning: "Alden Marsh!"

And swiftly, as though in response to a call, a definite, conscious thought from the other personality presented itself: "Yes? What would you have of me?"

Edith lay back among her pillows, as the clock struck the half hour. The body, as though resentful of denial, urged itself swiftly upon her now. Her heart beat tumultuously, her hands shook, she thrilled from head to foot with actual physical pain. The darkness no longer seemed alive, but negative and dead, holding somewhere in its merciful depths the promise of rest.

Utterly exhausted, she closed her eyes and slept, to be roused by a tap at her door.

"Yes," she answered, drowsily, "come in!"

Madame came in, pulled up the shades and flooded the room with sunshine. "I 'm sorry if I 've disturbed you, dear, but I was afraid you were ill. I 've been here twice before."

Aroused from Sleep

Edith sat up and rubbed her eyes. "What time is it?"

"Half-past nine."

"Oh, I 'm so sorry! You must n't spoil me this way, for I do want to get up to breakfast. Why did n't you call me?"

Madame sat down on the side of the bed and patted Edith's outstretched hand with affectionate reassurance. "You 're to do just as you please," she said, "but I was beginning to worry a bit, for you 've been the soul of punctuality."

"Did—" Edith closed her lips firmly upon the instinctive question, "Did he miss me?" She dismissed it as the mere vapouring of a vacant brain.

"Did what?" asked Madame, helpfully.

"Did you miss me?"

"Of course. Alden did too. The last thing he said before he went to school was that he hoped you were not ill."

"That was nice of him." Edith put a small pink foot out of bed on the other side and gazed at it pensively. Madame laughed.

"I don't believe you 've grown up," she said. "You remind me of a small child, who has just discovered her toes. Do you want your breakfast up here?"

"No, I 'll come down. Give me half an hour and I 'll appear before you, clothed and in my right mind, with as humble an apology

Call of the Wander-Lust

for my sins as I 'm able to compose in the meantime."

She was as good as her word, appearing promptly at the time she had set, and dressed for the street. After doing justice to a hearty breakfast, she said that she was going out for a walk and probably would not be back to luncheon.

"My dear!" exclaimed Madame. "You must n't do that. I 'll have luncheon kept for you."

"No, please don't, for I really shan't want any. Did n't you observe my breakfast? Even a piano-mover could n't think of eating again before seven, so let me go a-gypsying till sunset."

Madame nodded troubled acquiescence, and, with a laugh, Edith kissed her good-bye. "I 'm subject to the Wander-lust," she said, "and when the call comes, I have to go. It 's in my blood to-day, so farewell for the present."

Madame watched her as she went down the street, the golden quill on her green hat bidding jaunty defiance to the wind. As she had said, she felt the call at times, and had to yield to its imperative summons, but to-day it was her soul that craved the solace of the open spaces and the wind-swept fields.

As she dressed, she had tried to dismiss last night's experience as a mere fantasy of

Roaming through the Village

sleep, or, if not an actual dream, some vision hailing from the borderland of consciousness, at the point where the senses merge. Yet, even as she argued with herself, she felt the utter futility of it, and knew her denials were vain in the face of truth.

She dreaded the necessity of meeting Alden again, then made a wry face at her own foolishness. "Ridiculous," she said to herself, "preposterous, absurd!" No matter what her own nightmares might be, he slept soundly —of course he did. How could healthy youth with a clear conscience do otherwise?

For an hour or more, she kept to the streets of the village, with the sublime unconsciousness of the city-bred, too absorbed in her own thoughts to know that she was stared at and freely commented upon by those to whom a stranger was a source of excitement. Her tailored gown, of dark green broadcloth, the severe linen shirtwaist, and her simple hat, were subjects of conversation that night in more than one humble home, fading into insignificance only before her radiant hair. The general opinion was that it must be a wig, or the untoward results of some experiment with hair-dye, probably the latter, for, as the postmaster's wife said, "nobody would buy a wig of that colour."

The school bell rang for dismissal, and filled her with sudden panic. After walking through

The Finding of the Red Book

the village all the morning to escape luncheon with Alden, it would be disagreeable to meet him face to face almost at the schoolhouse door. Turning in the opposite direction, she walked swiftly until she came to a hill, upon which an irregular path straggled half-heartedly upward.

So Edith climbed the Hill of the Muses, pausing several times to rest. When she reached the top, she was agreeably surprised to find a comfortable seat waiting her, even though it was only a log rolled back against two trees. She sank back into the hollow, leaned against the supporting oak, and wiped her flushed face.

Others had been there before her, evidently, for the turf was worn around the log, and there were even hints of footprints here and there. "Some rural trysting place, probably," she thought, then a gleam of scarlet caught her attention. A small red book had fallen into the crevice between the log and the other tree. *"The House of Life,"* she murmured, under her breath. "Now, who in this little village would—unless——"

The book bore neither name nor initials, but almost every page was marked. As it happened, most of them were favourite passages of her own. "How idyllic!" she mused; "a pair of young lovers reading Rossetti on a hill-top in Spring! Could anything be more

Mutually Surprised

pastoral? I 'll take it back to the house and tell about it at dinner."

She welcomed it as a sure relief from a possible awkward moment. "I knew I was right," she said to herself, as she turned the pages. "To-day was set aside, long ago, for me to go a-gypsying."

The clear air of the heights and the sunlit valley beneath her gave her a sense of proportion and of value which she realised she had sadly needed. Free from the annoyances of her daily life, she could look back upon it with due perspective, and see that her unhappiness had been largely caused by herself.

"I can't be miserable," she thought, "unless I 'm willing to be."

She sat there for a long time, heedless of the passing hours. She was roused from her reverie by a muffled footstep and an involuntary exclamation of astonishment.

"Why, how do you do, Miss Starr?" said Edith, kindly, offering a well-gloved hand. "Are you out gypsying too?"

"Yes," Rosemary stammered. Her eyes were fixed upon the small red book that Mrs. Lee held in her other hand.

"See what I found," Edith went on, heedlessly. "Rossetti's *House of Life*, up here. Boy Blue must have brought it up to read to Bo-Peep in the intervals of shepherding. There may not be any such word as 'shep-

Shrines Laid Bare

herding,' but there ought to be. I love to make words, don't you?"

"Yes," said Rosemary, helplessly. She had thought Alden had the book, but had forgotten to make sure, and now the most precious hours of her life had been invaded and her shrines laid bare. Was it not enough for this woman to live in the same house with Alden? Need she take possession of the Hill of the Muses and the little book which had first awakened her, then brought them together? Resentful anger burned in her cheeks, all the more pitiful because of Mrs. Lee's utter unconsciousness, and the impossibility of reparation, even had she known.

"Sit down," Edith suggested. "You must be tired. It 's a long climb."

"Did—did you come up here to—to meet anyone?" The suspicion broke hotly from Rosemary's pale lips.

Edith might have replied that she came up to avoid meeting anyone, but she only said, with cool astonishment: "Why, no. Why should I?"

There was no answer to that. Indeed, thought Rosemary, floundering helplessly in a sea of pain, there was no reason. Was she not in the same house with him, day in and day out?

"She 's married," Rosemary said to herself with stern insistence, trying to find comfort

in the thought, but comfort strangely failed now. Another suspicion assailed her and was instantly put into headlong speech. "Is your husband dead, or are you divorced?"

Mrs. Lee turned quickly. She surveyed the girl calmly for an instant, entirely unable to translate her evident confusion; then she rose.

"Neither," she returned, icily, "and if there are no other personal questions you desire to ask me, I 'll go back."

Rosemary kept back the tears until Mrs. Lee was out of sight. "She 's married," she sobbed, "and he is n't dead, and they 're not divorced, so why—oh, why?" The pain unreasonably persisted, taking to itself a fresh hold. She had offended Mrs. Lee and she would tell Alden, and Alden would be displeased and would never forgive her.

If she were to run after her, and apologise, assuring her that she had not meant the slightest offence, perhaps—. She stumbled to her feet, but, even as she did so, she knew that it was too late. She longed with all the passion of her desolate soul for Alden's arms around her, for only the touch of his hand or the sound of his voice, saying: "Rosemary! Rosemary dear!" But it was too late for that also—everything came too late!

By the time she reached the foot of the hill Edith had understood and pardoned Rose-

Like a Nymph

mary. "Poor child," she thought. "Think of her loving him, and actually being jealous of me! And, man-like, of course, he 's never noticed it. For her sake, I hope he won't."

She waited to gather a spray or two of wild crab-apple blossoms, then went home. She did not see Alden, but stopped to exchange a few words with Madame, then went on upstairs. The long walk had wearied her, but it had also made her more lovely. After an hour of rest and a cool shower, she was ready to dress for dinner.

She chose a dinner-gown of white embroidered chiffon that she had not yet worn. It was cut away a little at the throat and the sleeves came to the elbow. She was not in the mood for jewels, but she clasped a string of pearls around her perfect throat, and put the crab-apple blossoms in her hair. The experiment was rather daring, but wholly successful, as she took care to have green leaves between her hair and the blossoms.

When she went down, Madame and Alden were waiting for her, Alden in evening clothes as usual and Madame in her lavender gown.

"You look like a nymph of Botticelli's," commented Alden, with a smile. There was no trace of confusion, or even of consciousness in his manner, and, once again, Edith reproached herself for her foolishness.

"Don't Leave Me Alone"

Dinner was cheerful, though not lively. Once or twice, Edith caught Alden looking at her with a strange expression on his face. Madame chattered on happily, of the vineyard and the garden and the small household affairs that occupied her attention.

Afterward, Alden read the paper and the other two played cribbage. It was only a little after nine when Madame, concealing a yawn, announced that she was tired and would go to bed, if she might be excused.

Edith rose with alacrity. "I 'll come, too," she said. "It 's astonishing how sleepy it makes one to be outdoors."

"Don't," Madame protested. "We must n't leave him entirely alone. You can sleep late to-morrow morning if you choose."

"Please don't leave me alone, Mrs. Lee," pleaded Alden, rather wickedly.

"All right," Edith answered, accepting the inevitable as gracefully as she might. "Shall I play solitaire while you read the paper?"

"If you like," he replied.

Madame took her candle and bade them good-night. As she went up-stairs, Edith said, with a pout: "I wish I were going to bed too."

"You can't sleep all the time," he reminded her. The paper had slipped to the floor. "Mother tells me that you slept this morning until half-past nine."

The Souvenir of Rural Lovers

"Yes—but—." She bit her lips and the colour rose to her temples. She hastily shuffled the cards and began to play solitaire so rapidly that he wondered whether she knew what cards she was playing.

"But," he said, "you did n't sleep well last night. Was that what you were going to say?"

Edith dropped her cards, and looked him straight in the face. "I slept perfectly," she lied. "Did n't you?"

"I slept just as well as you did," he answered. She thought she detected a shade of double meaning in his tone.

"I had a long walk to-day," she went on, "and it made me sleepy. Look," she continued, going to the mantel where she had left the book. "See what I found on top of a hill, in a crevice between an oak and a log that lay against it. Do you think some pair of rural lovers left it there?"

"Possibly," he replied. If the sight of the book he had loaned Rosemary awoke any emotion, or even a memory, he did not show it. "Sit down," he suggested, imperturbably, "and let me see if I can't find a sonnet that fits you. Yes, surely—here it is. Listen."

She rested her head upon her hand and turned her face away from him. In his smooth, well-modulated voice, he read :

Alden Reads a Sonnet

HER GIFTS

High grace, the dower of queens; and therewithal
Some wood-born wonder's sweet simplicity;
A glance like water brimming with the sky
Or hyacinth-light where forest shadows fall;
Such thrilling pallor of cheek as doth enthral
The heart; a mouth whose passionate forms imply
All music and all silence held thereby;
Deep golden locks, her sovereign coronal;
A round reared neck, meet column of Love's shrine
To cling to when the heart takes sanctuary;
Hands which forever at Love's bidding be,
And soft-stirred feet still answering to his sign:—
These are her gifts, as tongue may tell them o'er.
Breathe low her name, my soul, for that means more.

Her heart beat wildly and her colour came and went, but, with difficulty, she controlled herself until he reached the end. When she rose, he rose also, dropping the book.

"Mrs. Lee—Edith!"

"Yes," she said, with a supreme effort at self-command, "it is a pretty name, is n't it?" She was very pale, but she offered him her hand. "I really must go now," she continued, "for I am tired. Thank you—and good-night."

Alden did not answer—in words. He took the hand she offered him, held it firmly in his own, stooped, and kissed the hollow of her elbow, just below the sleeve.

XII

Asking—Not Answer

No Guarantee

"SHE 'S married, and he is n't dead, and they 're not divorced. She 's married and he is n't dead, and they 're not divorced." Rosemary kept saying it to herself mechanically, but no comfort came. Through the long night, wakeful and wretched, she brooded over the painful difference between the woman to whom Alden had plighted his troth and the beautiful stranger whom he saw every day.

"She 's married," Rosemary whispered, to the coarse unbleached muslin of her pillow. "And when we 're married—" ah, it would all be different then. But would it? In a flash she perceived that marriage itself guarantees nothing in the way of love.

Hurt to her heart's core, Rosemary sat up in bed and pondered, while the tears streamed over her cheeks. She had not seen Alden since Mrs. Lee came, except the day she had gone there to tea, wearing her white muslin under her brown alpaca. There was no way

Hugging Her Grief

to see him, unless she went there again—the very thought of that made her shudder—or signalled from her hill-top with the scarlet ribbon.

And, to her, the Hill of the Muses was like some holy place that had been profaned. The dainty feet of the stranger had set themselves upon her path in more ways than one. What must life be out in the world, when the world was full of women like Mrs. Lee, perhaps even more beautiful? Was everyone, married or not, continually stabbed by some heartbreaking difference between herself and another?

Having the gift of detachment immeasurably beyond woman, man may separate himself from his grief, contemplate it calmly in its various phases, and, with a mighty effort, throw it aside. Woman, on the contrary, hugs hers close to her aching breast and remorselessly turns the knife in her wound. It is she who keeps anniversaries, walks in cemeteries, wears mourning, and preserves trifles that sorrowfully have outlasted the love that gave them.

If she could only see him once! And yet, what was there to say or what was there to do, beyond sobbing out her desolate heart in the shelter of his arms? Could she tell him that she was miserable because she had come face to face with a woman more beautiful than she; that she doubted his loyalty, his

Worn and Weary

devotion? From some far off ancestor, her woman's dower of pride and silence suddenly asserted itself in Rosemary. When he wanted her, he would find her. If he missed her signal, fluttering from the birch tree in the Spring wind, he could write and say so. Meanwhile she would not seek him, though her heart should break from loneliness and despair.

Craving the dear touch of him, the sound of his voice, or even the sight of his tall well-knit figure moving along swiftly in the dusk, she compelled herself to accept the situation, bitterness and all. Across her open window struck the single long deepening shadow that precedes daybreak, then grey lights dawned on the far horizon, paling the stars to points of pearl upon dim purple mists. Worn and weary, Rosemary slept until she was called to begin the day's dreary round of toil, as mechanical as the ticking of a clock.

Cold water removed the traces of tears from her cheeks, but her eyes were red and swollen. The cheap mirror exaggerated her plainness, while memory pitilessly emphasised the beauty of the other woman. As she dressed, the thought came to her that, no matter what happened, she could still go on loving him, that she might always give, whether or not she received anything at all in return.

"Service," she said to herself, remembering

her dream. "and sacrifice. Giving, not receiving; asking, not answer." If this indeed was love, she had it in fullest measure, so why should she ask for more?

Waiting for Breakfast

"Rosemary!"

"Yes," she called back, trying hard to make her voice even, "I 'm coming!"

"It beats all," Grandmother said, fretfully, when she rushed breathlessly into the dining-room. "For the life of me I can't understand how you can sleep so much."

Rosemary smiled grimly, but said nothing.

"Here I 've been settin', waitin' for my breakfast, since before six, and it 's almost seven now."

"Never mind," the girl returned, kindly; "I 'll get it ready just as quickly as I can."

"I was just sayin'," Grandmother continued when Aunt Matilda came into the room, "that it beats all how Rosemary can sleep. I 've been up since half-past five and she 's just beginnin' to get breakfast, and here you come, trailin' along in with your hair not combed, at ten minutes to breakfast time. I should think you 'd be ashamed."

"My hair is combed," Matilda retorted, quickly on the defensive.

"I don't know when it was," Grandmother fretted. "I ain't seen it combed since I can remember."

"Then it 's because you ain't looked.

Fluffy hair

Any time you want to see me combin' my hair you can come in. I do it every morning."

Grandmother laughed, sarcastically. "'Pears like you thought you was one of them mermaids I was readin' about in the paper once. They 're half fish and half woman and they set on rocks, combin' their hair and singin' and the ships go to pieces on the rocks 'cause the sailors are so anxious to see 'em they forget where they 're goin'."

"There ain't no rocks outside my door as I know of," Matilda returned, "and only one rocker inside."

"No, nor your hair ain't like theirs neither. The paper said their hair was golden."

"Must be nice and stiff," Matilda commented. "I 'd hate to have my hair all wire."

Grandmother lifted her spectacles from the wart and peered through them critically. "I dunno," she said, "as it 'd look any different, except for the colour. The way you 're settin' now, against the light, I can see bristles stickin' out all over it, same as if 't was wire."

"Fluffy hair is all the style now," said Matilda, complacently.

"Fluffy!" Grandmother grunted. "If that 's what you call it, I reckon it 'll soon go out. It might have been out for fifteen or twenty years and you not know it. I don't believe any self-respectin' woman would let her hair go like that. Why 'n the name of

Grandmother's Disappointment

common sense can't you take a hair brush and wet it in cold water and slick it up, so 's folks can see that it 's combed? Mine 's always slick, and nobody can't say that it is n't."

"Yes," Matilda agreed with a scornful glance, "it is slick, what there is of it."

Grandmother's head burned pink through her scanty white locks and her eyes flashed dangerously. Somewhat frightened, Matilda hastened to change the subject.

"She wears her hair like mine."

"She?" repeated Grandmother, pricking up her ears, "Who 's she?"

"You know—the company up to Marshs'."

"Who was tellin' you? The milkman, or his wife?"

"None of 'em," answered Matilda, mysteriously. Then, lowering her voice to a whisper, she added: "I seen her myself!"

"When?" Grandmother demanded. "You been up there, payin' back your own call?"

"She went by here yesterday," said Matilda, hurriedly.

"What was I doin'?" the old lady inquired, resentfully.

"One time you was asleep and one time you was readin'."

"What? Do you mean to tell me she went by here twice and you ain't never told me till now?"

"When you 've been readin'," Matilda

If Anything's Important

rejoined, with secret delight, "you 've always told me and Rosemary too that you wan't to be disturbed unless the house took afire. Ain't she, Rosemary?"

"What?" asked the girl, placing a saucer of stewed prunes at each place and drawing up the three chairs.

"Ain't she always said she did n't want to be disturbed when she was readin'?" She indicated Grandmother by an inclination of her frowsy head.

"I don't believe any of us like to be interrupted when we 're reading," Rosemary replied, tactfully. She disliked to "take sides," and always avoided it whenever possible.

"There," exclaimed Matilda, triumphantly.

"And the other time?" pursued Grandmother. Her eyes glittered and her cheeks burned with dull, smouldering fires.

"You was asleep."

"I could have been woke up, could n't I?"

"You could have been," Matilda replied, after a moment's thought, "but when you 've been woke up I ain't never liked to be the one what did it."

"If it 's anything important," Grandmother observed, as she began to eat, "I 'm willin' to be interrupted when I 'm readin', or to be woke up when I 'm asleep, and if that woman ever goes by the house again, I want to be

told of it, and I want you both to understand it, right here and now."

Have You Seen Her?

"What woman?" queried Rosemary. She had been busy in the kitchen and had not grasped the subject of the conversation, though the rumbling of it had reached her from afar.

"Marshs' company," said both voices at once.

"Oh!" Rosemary steadied herself for a moment against the back of her chair and then sat down.

"Have you seen her?" asked Grandmother.

"Yes." Rosemary's answer was scarcely more than a whisper. In her wretchedness, she told the truth, being unable to think sufficiently to lie.

"When?" asked Aunt Matilda.

"Where?" demanded Grandmother.

"Yesterday, when I was out for a walk." It was not necessary to go back of yesterday.

"Where was she?" insisted Grandmother.

"Up on the hill. I did n't know she was there when I went up. She was at the top, resting."

"Did she speak to you?" asked Aunt Matilda.

"Yes." Rosemary's voice was very low and had in it all the weariness of the world.

"What did she say?" inquired Grandmother, with the air of the attorney for the defence.

What Does She Look Like?

The spectacles were resting upon the wart now, and she peered over them disconcertingly.

"I asked you what she said," Grandmother repeated distinctly, after a pause.

"She said: 'How do you do, Miss Starr?'"

"How 'd she know who you were?"

"There, there, Mother," put in Aunt Matilda. "I reckon everybody in these parts knows the Starr family."

"Of course," returned the old lady, somewhat mollified. "What else did she say?"

"Nothing much," stammered Rosemary. "That is, I can't remember. She said it was a nice day, or something of that sort, and then she went back home. She did n't stay but a minute." So much was true, even though that minute had agonised Rosemary beyond words.

"What does she look like?" Grandmother continued, with deep interest.

"Not—like anybody we know. Aunt Matilda can tell you better than I can. She saw her too."

Accepting modestly this tribute to her powers of observation, Aunt Matilda took the conversation out of Rosemary's hands, greatly to her relief. The remainder of breakfast was a spirited dialogue. Grandmother's doubt on any one point was quickly silenced by the sarcastic comment from Matilda: "Well, bein' as you 've seen her and I have n't, of course you know."

Meanwhile Rosemary ate, not knowing what she ate, choking down her food with glass after glass of water which by no means assuaged the inner fires. While she was washing the breakfast dishes the other two were discussing Mrs. Lee's hair. Grandmother insisted that it was a wig, as play-actresses always wore them and Mrs. Lee was undoubtedly a play-actress.

"How do you know?" Matilda inquired, with sarcastic inflection.

"If she ain't," Grandmother parried, "what 's she gallivantin' around the country for without her husband?"

"Maybe he 's dead."

"If he 's dead, why ain't she wearin' mourning, as any decent woman would? She 's either a play-actress, or else she 's a divorced woman, or maybe both." Either condition, in Grandmother's mind, was the seal of social damnation.

"If we was on callin' terms with the Marshs," said Matilda, meditatively, "Mis' Marsh might be bringin' her here."

"Not twice," returned Grandmother, with determination. "This is my house, and I 've got something to say about who comes in it. I would n't even have Mis' Marsh now, after she 's been hobnobbin' with the likes of her."

After reverting for a moment to the copper-coloured hair, which might or might not be a

Working Faithfully

wig, the conversation drifted back to mermaids and the seafaring folk who went astray on the rocks. Aunt Matilda insisted that there were no such things as mermaids, and Grandmother triumphantly dug up the article in question from a copy of *The Household Guardian* more than three months old.

"It 's a lie, just the same," Matilda protested, though weakly, as one in the last ditch.

"Matilda Starr!" The clarion note of Grandmother's voice would have made the dead stir. "Ain't I showed it to you, in the paper?" To question print was as impious as to doubt Holy Writ.

Rosemary was greatly relieved when Mrs. Lee gave way to mermaids in the eternal flow of talk. She wondered, sometimes, that their voices did not fail them, though occasionally a sulky silence or a nap produced a brief interval of peace. She worked faithfully until her household tasks were accomplished, discovering that, no matter how one's heart aches, one can do the necessary things and do them well.

Early in the afternoon, she found herself free. Instinct and remorseless pain led her unerringly to the one place, where the great joy had come to her. She searched her suffering dumbly, and without mercy. If she knew the reason why!

"She 's married, and her husband is n't

Something Snapped

dead, and they're not divorced." Parrot-like, Rosemary repeated the words to herself, emphasising each fact with a tap of her foot on the ground in front of her. Then a new fear presented itself, clutching coldly at her heart. Perhaps they were going to be divorced and then——

Something seemed to snap, like the breaking of a strained tension. Rosemary had come to the point where she could endure no more, and mercifully the pain was eased. Later on, no doubt, she could suffer again, but for the moment she felt only a dull weariness. In the background the ache slumbered, like an ember that is covered with ashes, but now she was at rest.

She looked about her curiously, as though she were a stranger. Yet, at the very spot where she stood, Mrs. Lee had stood yesterday, her brown eyes cold with controlled anger when she made her sarcastic farewell. When she first saw her, she had been sitting on the log, where Alden usually sat. Down in the hollow tree was the wooden box that held the red ribbon. Shyly, the nine silver birches, with bowed heads, had turned down the hillside and stopped. Across, on the other side of the hill, where God hung His flaming tapestries of sunset from the high walls of Heaven, Rosemary had stood that day, weeping, and Love had come to comfort her.

Another Standard

None of it mattered now—nothing mattered any more. She had reached the end, whatever the end might be. Seemingly it was a great pause of soul and body, the consciousness of arrival at the ultimate goal.

When she saw Alden, she would ask to be released. She could tell him, with some semblance of truth, that she could not leave Grandmother and Aunt Matilda, because they needed her, and after they had done so much for her, she could not bring herself to seem ungrateful, even for him. The books were full of such things—the eternal sacrifice of youth to age, which age unblushingly accepts, perhaps in remembrance of some sacrifice of its own.

He had told her, long ago, that she was the only woman he knew. Now he had another standard to judge her by and, at the best, she must fall far short of it. Some day Alden would marry—he must marry, and have a home of his own when his mother was no longer there to make it for him, and she—she was not good enough for him, any more than Cinderella was good enough for the Prince.

The fact that the Prince had considered Cinderella fully his equal happily escaped Rosemary now. Clearly before her lay the one thing to be done: to tell him it was all a mistake, and ask for freedom before he forced it upon her. He had been very kind the other

day, when she had gone there to tea but, naturally, he had seen the difference—must have seen it.

Of course it would not be Mrs. Lee—Rosemary could laugh at that now. Her jealousy of an individual had been merely the recognition of a type, and her emotion the unfailing tribute inferiority accords superiority. Married, and her husband not dead, nor divorced—manifestly it could not be Mrs. Lee.

She longed to set him free, to bid him mate with a woman worthy of him. Some glorious woman, Rosemary thought, with abundant beauty and radiant hair, with a low, deep voice that vibrated through the room like some stringed instrument and lingered, in melodious echoes, like music that has ceased. She saw her few days of joy as the one perfect thing she had ever had, the one gift she had prayed for and received. This much could never be taken away from her. She had had it and been blessed by it, and now the time had come to surrender it. What was she, that she might hope to keep it?

"Lo, what am I to Love, the Lord of all
One little shell upon the murmuring sand,
One little heart-flame sheltered in his hand—"

The moment of shelter became divinely dear. Already, in her remembrance, she had placed a shrine to which she might go, in

No One Came

silence, when things became too hard. She would have written to Alden, if she had had a sheet of paper, and an envelope, and a stamp, but she had not, and dared not face the torrent of questions she would arouse by asking for it.

Her face transfigured by a passion of renunciation, Rosemary reached into the hollow tree for the wooden box, and, for the last time unwound the scarlet ribbon. She tied it to the lowest bough of the birch when the school bell rang, and went back to wait. Without emotion, she framed the few words she would say. "Just tell him it 's all a mistake, that they need me and I must n't leave them, and so good-bye. And if he tries to kiss me for good-bye—oh, he must n't, for I could n't bear that!"

So Rosemary sat and waited—until almost dark, but no one came. Alden had, indeed, hurried home to have afternoon tea with his mother and Edith. He had almost forgotten the oriflamme that sometimes signalled to him from the top of the hill, and seldom even glanced that way.

In the gathering dusk, Rosemary took it down, unemotionally. It seemed only part of the great denial. She put it back into the box, and hid it in the tree.

"Service," she said to herself, as she went home, "and sacrifice. Giving, not receiving; asking, not answer. And this is love!"

XIII

The Stain of the Rose

Put Aside

ALDEN had put Rosemary aside as though in a mental pigeon-hole. If vague thoughts of her came now and then to trouble him, he showed no sign of it. As weeks and months had sometimes passed without a meeting, why should it be different now? Moreover, he was busy, as she must know, with the vineyard and school, and a guest.

He had ordered several books on the subject of vine-culture, and was reading a great deal, though a close observer might have noted long intervals in which he took no heed of the book, but stared dreamily into space. He saw Edith at the table, and in the evenings, and occasionally at afternoon tea—a pleasant custom which she and Madame never failed to observe,—but she seemed to make it a point not to trespass upon his daylight hours.

The apple blossoms had gone, blown in fragrant drifts afar upon field and meadow. The vineyard lay lazily upon its southern slope, basking in the sun. Sometimes a wan-

Alden's Feast

dering wind brought a fresh scent of lusty leaves or a divine hint of bloom.

The old-fashioned square piano, long silent, was open now, and had been put in order. In the evenings, after dinner, Edith would play, dreamily, in the dusk or by the light of one candle. The unshaded light, shining full upon her face, brought out the delicacy of her profile and allured stray gleams from the burnished masses of her hair. In the soft shadows that fell around her, she sat like St. Cecilia, unconscious of self, and of the man who sat far back in a corner of the room, never taking his eyes from her face.

Wistfulness was in every line of her face and figure, from the small white-shod foot that rested upon the pedal to the glorious hair that shimmered and shone but still held its tangled lights safely in its silken strands. The long line from shoulder to wrist, the smooth, satiny texture of the rounded arm, bare below the elbow, the delicate hands, so beautifully cared-for, all seemed eloquent with yearning.

Alden, from his safe point of observation, feasted his soul to the full. The ivory whiteness of her neck shaded imperceptibly into the creamy lace of her gown. Underneath her firm, well rounded chin, on the left side, was a place that was almost a dimple, but not quite. There was a real dimple in her

Edith at the Piano

chin and another at each corner of her mouth, where the full scarlet lips drooped a little from sadness. Star-like, her brown eyes searched the far shadows and sometimes the flicker of the candle brought a dancing glint of gold into their depths. And as always, like a halo, stray gleams hovered about her head, bent slightly forward now and full into the light, throwing into faint relief the short straight nose, and the full, short upper lip.

Smiling, and wholly unconscious, it was as though she pleaded with the instrument to give her back some half-forgotten melody. Presently the strings answered, shyly at first, then in full soft chords that sang and crooned through the dusk. Alden, in his remote corner, drew a long breath of rapture. The ineffable sweetness of her pervaded his house, not alone with the scent of violets, but with the finer, more subtle fragrance of her personality.

She wore no jewels, except her wedding ring—not even the big, blazing diamond with which her husband had sealed their betrothal. She had a string of pearls and a quaint, oriental necklace set with jade, and sometimes she wore one or two turquoises, or a great, pale sapphire set in silver, but that was all. Out of the world of glitter and sparkle, she had chosen these few things that suited her, and was content.

Madame in the Moonlight

From another corner came the sound of slow, deep breathing. Outside the circle of candlelight, Madame had fallen asleep in her chair. The full June moon had shadowed the net curtain upon the polished floor and laid upon it, in silhouette, an arabesque of oak leaves. It touched Madame's silvered hair to almost unearthly beauty as she leaned back with her eyes closed, and brought a memory of violets and sun from the gold-tasselled amethyst that hung on her breast. The small slender hands lay quietly, one on either arm of her chair. A white crêpe shawl, heavy with Chinese embroidery, lay over her shoulders,—a gift from Edith. A Summer wind, like a playful child, stole into the room, lifted the deep silk fringe of the shawl, made merry with it for a moment, then tinkled the prisms on the chandelier and ran away again.

The fairy-like sound of it, as though it were a far, sweet bell, chimed in with Edith's dreamy chords and brought her to herself with a start. She turned quickly, saw that Madame was asleep, and stopped playing.

"Go on," said Alden, in a low tone. "Please do."

"I must n't," she whispered, with her finger on her lips. "Your mother is asleep and I don't want to disturb her."

"Evidently you have n't," he laughed.

"Hush!" Edith's full, deep contralto took

Edith's Room

on an affected sternness. "You must n't talk."

"But I 've got to," he returned. "Shall we go outdoors?"

"Yes, if you like."

"Don't you want a wrap of some sort?"

"Yes. Wait a moment, and I 'll get it."

"No—tell me where it is, and I 'll go."

"It 's only a white chiffon scarf," she said. "I think you 'll find it hanging from the back of that low rocker, near the dressing-table."

He went up-stairs, silently and swiftly, and paused, for a moment, at Edith's door. It seemed strange to have her permission to turn the knob and go in. He hesitated upon the threshold, then entered the sweet darkness which, to him, would have meant Edith, had it been blown to him across the wastes of Sahara.

How still it was! Only the cheery piping of a cricket broke the exquisite peace of the room; only a patch of moonlight, upon the polished floor, illumined the scented dusk. He struck a match, and lighted one of the candles upon the dressing-table.

The place was eloquent of her, as though she had just gone out. The carved ivory toilet articles—he could have guessed that she would not have silver ones,—the crystal puff box, with a gold top ornamented only by a monogram; no, it was not a monogram either,

A Man's Face

but interlaced initials trailing diagonally across it; the mirror, a carelessly crumpled handkerchief, and a gold thimble—he picked up each article with a delightful sense of intimacy.

Face down upon the dressing-table was a photograph, framed in dull green leather. That, too, he took up without stopping to question the propriety of it. A man's face smiled back at him, a young, happy face, full of comradeship and the joy of life for its own sake.

This, then, was her husband! Alden's heart grew hot with resentment at the man who had made Edith miserable. He had put those sad lines under her eyes, that showed so plainly sometimes when she was tired, made her sweet mouth droop at the corners, and filled her whole personality with the wistfulness that struck at his heart, like the wistfulness of a little child.

This man, with the jovial countenance, and doubtless genial ways, had the right to stand at her dressing-table, if he chose, and speculate upon the various uses of all the daintiness that was spread before him. He had the right and cared nothing for it, while the man who did care, stood there shamefaced, all at once feeling himself an intruder in a sacred place.

He put the photograph back, face down, as it had been, took the scarf, put out the light,

On the Veranda

and went back down-stairs. He stopped for a moment in the hall to wonder what this was that assailed him so strangely, this passionate bitterness against the other man, this longing to shelter Edith from whatever might make her unhappy.

The living-room was dark. In her moonlit corner, Madame still slept. From where he stood, he could see the dainty little lavender-clad figure enwrapped in its white shawl. There was no sign of Edith in the room, so he went out upon the veranda, guessing that he should find her there.

She had taken out two chairs—a favourite rocker of her own, and the straight-backed, deep chair in which Alden usually sat when he was reading. The chairs faced each other, with a little distance between them. Edith sat in hers, rocking, with her hands crossed behind her head, and her little white feet stretched out in front of her.

Without speaking, Alden went back for a footstool. Then he turned Edith, chair and all, toward the moonlight, slipped the footstool under her feet, laid the fluttering length of chiffon over her shoulders, and brought his own chair farther forward.

"Why," she laughed, as he sat down, "do you presume to change my arrangements?"

"Because I want to see your face."

Effect of Moonlight

"Did n't it occur to you that I might want to see yours?"

"Not especially."

"My son," she said, in her most matronly manner, "kindly remember that a woman past her first youth always prefers to sit with her back toward the light."

"I 'm older than you are," he reminded her, "so don't be patronising."

"In years only," she returned. "In worldly wisdom and experience and all the things that count, I 'm almost as old as your mother is. Sometimes," she added, bitterly, "I feel as though I were a thousand."

A shadow crossed his face, but, as his figure loomed darkly against the moon, Edith did not see it. The caressing glamour of the light revealed the sad sweetness of her mouth, but presently her lips curved upward in a forced smile.

"Why is it?" she asked, "that moonlight makes one think?"

"I did n't know it did," he replied. "I thought it was supposed to have quite the opposite effect."

"It does n't with me. In the sun, I 'm sane, and have control of myself, but nights like this drive me almost mad sometimes."

"Why?" he asked gently, leaning toward her.

"Oh, I don't know," she sighed. "There 's

Edith's Husband

so much I might have that I have n't." Then she added, suddenly: "What did you think of my husband s picture?"

The end of the chiffon scarf rose to meet a passing breeze, then fell back against the softness of her arm. A great grey-winged night moth fluttered past them. From the high bough of a distant maple came the frightened twitter of little birds, wakeful in the night, and the soft, murmurous voice of the brooding mother, soothing them.

"How did you know?" asked Alden, slowly.

"Oh, I just knew. You were looking at my dressing-table first, and you picked up the picture without thinking. Then, as soon as you knew who it was, you put it down, found the scarf, and came out."

"Do you love him?"

"No. That is, I don't think I do. But—oh," she added, with a sharp indrawing of her breath, "how I did love him!"

"And he—" Alden went on. "Does he love you?"

"I suppose so, in his way. As much as he is capable of caring for anything except himself, he cares for me."

She rose and walked restlessly along the veranda, the man following her with his eyes, until she reached the latticed end, where a climbing crimson rose, in full bloom, breathed the fragrance of some far Persian garden.

The Crimson Rose

Reaching up, she picked one, on a long, slender stem.

Alden appeared beside her, with his knife in his hand. "Shall I take off the thorns for you?"

"No, I 'm used to thorns. Besides, the wise ones are those who accept things as they are." She thrust the stem into her belt, found a pin from somewhere, and pinned the flower itself upon the creamy lace of her gown.

"It 's just over your heart," he said. "Is your heart a rose too?"

"As far as thorns go, yes."

She leaned back against one of the white columns of the porch. She was facing the moonlight, but the lattice and the rose shaded her with fragrant dusk.

"Father and Mother planted this rose," Alden said, "the day they were married."

"How lovely," she answered, without emotion. "But to think that the rose has outlived one and probably will outlive the other!"

"Mother says she hopes it will. She wants to leave it here for me and my problematical children. The tribal sense runs rampant in Mother."

"When are you and Miss Starr going to be married?" asked Edith, idly.

Alden started. "How did you know?" he demanded, roughly, possessing himself of her

Mutual Understanding

hands. "Who told you—Mother, or—Miss Starr?"

"Neither," replied Edith, coldly, releasing herself. "I—just knew. I beg your pardon," she added, hastily. "Of course it 's none of my affair."

"But it is," he said, under his breath. Then, coming closer, he took her hands again. "Look here, Edith, there 's something between you and me—do you know it?"

"How do you mean?" She tried to speak lightly, but her face was pale.

"You know very well what I mean. How do you know what I think, what I do, what I am? And the nights—no, don't try to get away from me—from that first night when I woke at four and knew you were crying, to that other night when you knew it was I who was awake with you, and all the nights since when the tide of time has turned between three and four! I 've known your thoughts, your hopes, your dreams, as you 've known mine!

"And the next day," he went on, "when you avoid me even with your eyes; when you try to hide with laughter and light words your consciousness of the fact that the night before you and I have met somewhere, in some mysterious way, and known each other as though we were face to face! Can you be miserable, and I not know it? Can I be tormented by

Oblivious of Time and Space

a thousand doubts, and you not know it? Could you be ill, or troubled, or even perplexed, and I not know, though the whole world lay between us? Answer me!"

Edith's face was very white and her lips almost refused to move. "Oh, Boy," she whispered, brokenly. "What does it mean?"

"This," he answered, imperiously. "It means this—and now!"

He took her into his arms, crushing her to him so tightly that she almost cried out with the delicious pain of it. In the rose-scented shadow, his mouth found hers.

Time and space were no more. At the portal of the lips, soul met soul. The shaded veranda, and even the house itself faded away. Only this new-born ecstasy lived, like a flaming star suddenly come to earth.

Madame stirred in her sleep. Then she called, drowsily: "Alden! Edith!" No one answered, because no one heard. She got up, smothering a yawn behind her hand, wondered that there were no lights, waited a moment, heard nothing, and came to the window.

The moon flooded the earth with enchantment—a silvery ocean of light breaking upon earth-bound shores. A path of it lay along the veranda—opal and tourmaline and pearl, sharply turned aside by the shadow of the rose.

Madame drew her breath quickly. There

Pledges of Love

they stood, partly in the dusk and partly in the light, close in each other's arms, with the misty silver lying lovingly upon Edith's hair.

She sank back into a chair, remembering, with vague terror, the vision she had seen in the crystal ball. So, then, it was true, as she might have known. Sorely troubled, and with her heart aching for them both, she crept up-stairs.

"Boy," whispered Edith, shrinking from him. "Oh, Boy! The whole world lies between you and me!"

His only answer was to hold her closer still, to turn her mouth again to his. "Not to-night," he breathed, with his lips on hers. "God has given us to-night!"

White and shaken, but with her eyes shining like stars, at last she broke away from him. She turned toward the house, but he caught her and held her back.

"Say it," he pleaded. "Say you love me!"

"I do," she whispered. "Oh, have pity, and let me go!"

"And I," he answered, with his face illumined, "love you with all my heart and soul and strength and will—with every fibre of my being, for now and for ever. I am yours absolutely, while earth holds me, and even beyond that."

What Matters

Edith looked up quickly, half afraid. His eyes were glowing with strange, sweet fires.

"Say it!" he commanded. "Tell me you are mine!"

"I am," she breathed. "God knows I am, but no—I had forgotten for the moment!"

She broke into wild sobbing, and he put his arm around her with infinite tenderness. "Hush," he said, as one might speak to a child. "What has been does not matter—nothing matters now but this. In all the ways of Heaven, you are mine—mine for always, by divine right!"

"Yes," she said, simply, and lifted her tear-stained face to his.

He kissed her again, not with passion, but with that same indescribable tenderness. Neither said a word. They went into the house together, he found her candle, lighted it, and gave it to her.

She took it from him, smiling, though her hands trembled. Back in the shadow he watched her as she ascended, with a look of exaltation upon her face. Crimson petals were falling all around her, and he saw the stain of the rose upon her white gown, where he had crushed it against her heart.

Neither slept, until the tide of the night began to turn. Swiftly, to her, through the throbbing, living darkness, came a question and a call.

"Mine?"

Peace

Back surged the unmistakable answer: "Thine." Then, to both, came dreamless peace.

XIV

The Night before a Shrine

Madame Reproaches Herself

EDITH did not appear at breakfast. Alden seemed preoccupied, ate but little, and Madame, pale after a sleepless night, ate nothing at all. Furtively she watched her son, longing to share his thoughts and warn him against the trouble that inevitably lay ahead.

Woman-like, she blamed the woman, even including herself. She knew that what she had seen last night was not the evidence of a mere flirtation or passing fancy, and reproached herself bitterly because she had asked Edith to stay.

And yet, what mother could hope to shield her son against temptation in its most intoxicating form? For his thirty years he had lived in the valley, practically without feminine society. Only his mother, and, of late, Rosemary. Then, star-like upon his desert, Edith had arisen, young, beautiful, unhappy, with all the arts and graces a highly specialised civilisation bestows upon its women.

Looking Back

Madame's heart softened a little toward Edith. Perhaps she was not wholly to blame. She remembered the night Edith had endeavoured to escape a tête-à-tête with Alden and she herself had practically forced her to stay. Regardless of the warning given by the crystal ball, in which Madame now had more faith than ever, she had not only given opportunity, but had even forced it upon them.

Looking back, she could not remember, upon Edith's part, a word or even a look that had been out of place. She could recall no instance in which she had shown the slightest desire for Alden's society. Where another woman might have put herself in his way, times without number, Edith had kept to her own room, or had gone out alone.

On the contrary, Madame herself had urged drives and walks. Frequently she had asked Alden to do certain things and had reminded him of the courtesy due from host to guest. Once, when she had requested him to take Edith out for a drive, he had replied, somewhat sharply, that he had already invited her and she had refused to go.

Murmuring an excuse, Alden left the table and went out. Madame was rather glad to be left alone, for she wanted time to think, not as one thinks in darkness, when one painful subject, thrown out of perspective, assumes

Madame's View of the Case

exaggerated proportions of importance, but in clear, sane sunlight, surrounded by the reassuring evidences of every-day living.

Obviously she could not speak to either. She could not say to Alden: "I saw you last night with Edith in your arms and that sort of thing will not do." Nor could she say to Edith: "My dear, you must remember that you are a married woman." She must not only wait for confidences, but must keep from them both, for ever, the fact that she had accidentally stumbled upon their divine moment.

After long thought, and eager to be just, she held Edith practically blameless, yet, none the less, earnestly wished that she would go home. She smiled whimsically, wishing that there were a social formula in which, without offence, one might request an invited guest to depart. She wondered that one's home must be continually open, when other places are permitted to close. The graceful social lie, "Not at home," had never appealed to Madame. Why might not one say, truthfully: "I am sorry you want to see me, for I have n't the slightest desire in the world to see you. Please go away." Or, to an invited guest: "When I asked you to come I wanted to see you, but I have seen quite enough of you for the present, and would be glad to have you go home."

Her reflections were cut short by the appearance of Edith herself, wan and weary, very pale, but none the less transfigured by secret joy. Her eyes, alight with mysterious fires, held in their starry depths a world of love and pain. In some occult way she suggested to Madame a light burning before a shrine.

Edith did not care for breakfast but forced herself to eat a little. She responded to Madame's polite inquiries in monosyllables, and her voice was faint and far away. Yes, she was well. No, she had not slept until almost morning. No, nothing was making her unhappy—that was, nothing new. After all, perhaps she did have a headache. Yes, she believed she would lie down. It was very kind of Madame but she did not believe she wanted any luncheon and certainly would not trouble anyone to bring it up.

Yet at noon, when Madame herself appeared with a tempting tray, Edith gratefully accepted a cup of coffee. She was not lying down, but was sitting in her low rocker, with her hands clasped behind her head and the photograph of her husband on the dressing-table before her.

"Yes," she said, in answer to Madame's inquiring glance, "that's my husband. It was taken just about the time we were married."

On the Stroke of Seven

Madame took the picture, studied it for a moment, then returned it to its place. She made no comment, having been asked for none.

"Won't you lie down, dear?"

"Yes, I believe I will."

"Truly?"

"Yes—I promise."

With a sad little smile she kissed Madame, closed the door, and turned the key in the lock. The old lady sighed as she went down with the tray, reflecting how impossible it is really to aid another, unless the barrier of silence be removed.

At four, she had her tea alone. No sound came from upstairs, and Alden neither returned to luncheon nor sent word. When he came in, a little past six, he was tired and muddy, his face was strained and white, and, vouchsafing only the briefest answers to his mother's solicitude, went straight to his room.

Exactly upon the stroke of seven, both appeared, Alden in evening clothes as usual, and Edith in her black gown, above which her face was deathly white by contrast, in spite of the spangles. She wore no ornaments, not even the string of pearls about her bare throat.

"You look as though you were in mourning, my dear," said Madame. "Let me get you a red rose."

Things to Be Said

She started toward the veranda, but, with a little cry, Edith caught her and held her back. "No," she said, in a strange tone, "roses are—not for me!"

The dinner-gong chimed in with the answer, and the three went out together. Neither Alden nor Edith made more than a pretence of eating. Edith held her head high and avoided even his eyes, though more than once Madame saw the intensity of his appeal.

Afterward he took his paper, Madame her fancy work, and Edith, attempting to play solitaire, hopelessly fumbled her cards. Madame made a valiant effort to carry on a conversation alone, but at length the monologue wearied her, and she slipped quietly out of the room.

Edith turned, with a start, and hurriedly rose to follow her. Alden intercepted her. "No," he said, quietly. "There are things to be said between you and me."

"I thought," Edith murmured, as she sank into the chair he offered her, "that everything was said last night."

"Everything? Perhaps, but not for the last time."

She leaned forward, into the light, put her elbows upon the table, and rested her head upon her clasped hands, as though to shade her eyes. "Well?" she said, wearily.

"Look at me!"

Vows and the Law

Her hands trembled, but she did not move. He leaned across the table, unclasped her hands gently, and forced her to look at him. Her eyes were swimming with unshed tears.

"Darling! My darling! Have I made you unhappy?"

"No," she faltered. "How could you?"

He came to her, sat down on the arm of her chair, slipped his arm around her, and held her close against his shoulder. "Listen," he said. "You belong to me, don't you?"

"Absolutely."

"Could you—could you—make yourself free?"

"Yes, as you mean it, I could."

"Then—when?"

"Never!" The word rang clear, tensely vibrant with denial.

"Edith! What do you mean?"

Releasing herself she stood and faced him. "This," she said. "At the altar I pledged myself in these words: 'Until death do us part,' and 'Forsaking all others, keep thee only unto me so long as we both shall live.' Is n't that plain?"

"The law," he began.

"Law!" repeated Edith. "Why don't you say perjury, and be done with it?"

"Dearest, you don't understand. You——"

"I know what I said," she reminded him,

grimly. "I said 'For better or worse,' not 'for better' only."

What of Miss Starr?

"You promised to love and to honour also, did n't you?"

Edith bowed her head. "I did," she answered, in a low tone, "and I have, and, God helping me, I shall do so again."

"Have I no rights?" he asked, with a sigh.

He could scarcely hear the murmured answer: "None."

"Nor you?"

She shook her head sadly, avoiding his eyes, then suddenly turned and faced him. "What of your own honour?" she demanded. "What of Miss Starr?"

"I have thought of that," he replied, miserably. "I have thought of nothing else all day."

Edith leaned back against the table. "What," she asked, curiously, "were you planning to do?"

The dull colour rose to his temples. "Go to her," he said, with his face averted, "tell her the truth like a man, and ask for freedom."

She laughed—the sort of laugh one hears from a woman tossing in delirium. Madame heard it, upstairs, and shuddered.

"Like a man!" Edith repeated, scornfully.

"Say it," he said, roughly. "Like a cad, if that 's what you mean."

She laughed again, but with a different

Suppose There Is Another Woman

cadence. "Ask yourself first," she continued, "and then be honest with me. How would you feel?"

He shrugged his shoulders uneasily. "I admit it, but I 'm willing to pay the price. I 'll feel like a cad all the rest of my life, if I must, in order to have you."

"If a man has no self-respect," she retorted, "what can he expect from his——"

"Wife," breathed Alden, in a rapturous whisper. "Oh, Edith, say you will!"

She turned away, for she could not force herself to meet his eyes. Her little white hands clasped the edge of the table tightly.

"Have you thought of this?" he continued. "Suppose, for him, there is another woman——"

"There is n't," she denied. "I know that."

"Perhaps not in the sense you mean, but if he were free——?"

Edith drew a long breath. "I never thought of that."

Steadily the man pursued his advantage. "There must be some reason for his treating you as he does—for making you miserable. If, for any cause whatever, he wanted his freedom, would it make—any difference to you?"

She tapped her foot restlessly upon the floor. The atmosphere was surcharged with expectancy, then grew tense with waiting. Alden's eyes never swerved from her face.

What Right?

"Have you any right, through principles of your own, which I thoroughly understand and respect, to keep a man bound who desires to be free?"

She swayed back and forth unsteadily. Alden assisted her to her chair and stood before her as she sat with her elbows upon her knees, her face hidden in her hands. With the precise observation one accords to trifles in moments of unendurable stress, he noted that two of the hooks which fastened her gown at the back of her neck had become unfastened and that the white flesh showed through the opening.

"If," said Alden, mercilessly, "he longs for his freedom, and the law permits him to take it, have you the right to force your principles upon him—and thus keep him miserable when he might otherwise be happy?"

The clock in the hall struck ten. The sound died into silence and the remorseless tick-tick went on. Outside a belated cricket fiddled bravely as he fared upon his way. The late moon flooded the room with light.

"Have you?" demanded Alden. He endeavoured to speak calmly, but his voice shook. "Answer me!"

Edith leaned back in her chair, white and troubled. "I don't know," she murmured, with lips that scarcely moved. "Before God, I don't know!"

Advantages of a Letter

The man went on pitilessly. "Don't you think you might find out? Before you condemn yourself and me to everlasting separation, don't you think you might at least ask him?"

"Yes," said Edith, slowly. "I might ask him. I 'll go——"

"No, you need n't go. Can't you write?"

"Yes," she returned. "I can write."

All the emotion had gone from her voice. She said the words as meaninglessly as a parrot might.

"A letter has distinct advantages," remarked Alden, trying to speak lightly. "You can say all you want to say before the other person has a chance to put in a word."

"Yes," she agreed, in the same meaningless tone. "That is true."

"When," queried Alden, after a pause, "will you write?"

"To-morrow."

He nodded his satisfaction. "Tell him," he suggested, "that you love another man, and——"

"No," she interrupted, "I won't tell him that. I 'll say that I 've tried my best to be a good wife, that I 've tried as best I knew to make him happy. I 'll say I 've—" she choked on the word—"I 'll say I 've failed. I 'll tell him I can do no more, that I do not believe I can ever do any better than I have

How Different!

done, and ask him to tell me frankly whether or not he prefers to be free. That 's all."

"That is n't enough. You have rights——"

"We 're not speaking of my rights," she said, coldly. "We 're speaking of his."

A silence fell between them, tense and awkward. The open gate between them had turned gently upon its hinges, then closed, with a suggestion of finality. The clock struck the half hour. Outside, the cricket still chirped cheerily, regardless of the great issues of life and love.

"Come outside," Alden pleaded, taking her hand in his.

"No," she said, but she did not withdraw her hand.

"Come, dear—come!"

He led her out upon the veranda where the moon made far-reaching shadows with the lattice and the climbing rose, then returned for chairs, the same two in which they had sat the night before. She was the first to break the pause.

"How different it all is!" she sighed. "Last night we sat here in the moonlight, just where we are now. In twenty-four hours, everything has changed."

> "The face of all the world is changed, I think,
> Since first I heard the footsteps of thy soul."

he quoted softly.

"When did you—know?" she asked.

"The night I read Rossetti to you and kissed your arm, do you remember? It rushed upon me like an overwhelming flood. When did you know?"

"I think I 've always known—not the fact, exactly, but the possibility of it. The first night I came, I knew that you and I could care a great deal for each other—not that we ever would, but merely that we might, under different circumstances. In a way, it was as though a set of familiar conditions might be seen in a different aspect, or in a different light."

"From the first," he said, "you 've meant a great deal to me, in every way. I was discontented, moody, restless, and unhappy when you came. That was mainly responsible for——"

He hesitated, glanced at her, accepted her nod of understanding, and went on.

"I 've hated the vineyard and the rest of my work. God only knows how I 've hated it! It 's seemed sometimes that I 'd die if I did n't get away from it. Mother and I had it out one day, and finally I decided to stay, merely to please her. Because I had nothing more to do than to make her happy, I determined to make the best of things. You 've made me feel that, in a way, it 's myself that 's at stake. I want to take it and make it

widely known among vineyards, as it has been—for my own sake, and for yours."

Edith leaned toward him, full into the light. Her face, still pale, was rapt—almost holy. To him, as to Madame earlier in the day, she somehow suggested the light before a shrine. "Thank you," she said. The low, full contralto tones were vibrant with emotion.

There was a pause. As though a light had been suddenly thrown upon one groping in darkness, Alden saw many things. His longing for Edith, while no less intense, became subtly different. He seemed to have turned a corner and found everything changed.

"Dear," he went on, "there's something wonderful about this. I've—" he stopped and cleared his throat. "I mean it's so exquisitely pure, so transcendently above passion. Last night, when I had you in my arms, it was n't man and woman—it was soul and soul. Do you understand?"

"Yes, I know. Passion is n't love—any more than hunger is, but an earth-bound world seldom sees above the fog of sense."

"I could love you always," he returned, "and never so much as touch your hand or kiss you again."

She nodded, smiling full comprehension. Then she asked, briefly: "Why write?"

"Merely because we belong to one another in a divine sense, and marriage is the earthly

sanction of it—or ought to be. If you and I were both free, and I thought marriage would in any way change this, I—I would n't ask you to marry me."

Rising from her chair, she bent over, kissed him on the forehead, went to the lattice, picked another rose, and came back. "See," she said, standing in the light; "life and beauty and joy—all in a rose."

"And love," he added.

"And love." She held it at arm's length. Sharply defined, the shadow fell upon the white floor of the veranda, perfect in line.

"And there," she continued, "is the same thing in another form. It is still a rose—anyone can see that. Only the colour and fragrance are gone, but one can remember both. To-morrow I 'll write, and find out which we 're to have—the rose, or the shadow of the rose."

"It 's chance," he said, "like the tossing of a coin."

"Most things are," she reminded him. "Did you ever stop to think what destinies attend the opening or closing of a door?"

He made no answer. "Good-night," she said, with a smile.

"Good-night, my beloved." His face was illumined with "the light that never was on sea or land," but he did not even attempt to touch her hand.

XV

The Inlaid Box

Beauty

"'BEAUTY,'" read Grandmother Starr, with due emphasis upon every word, "'is the birthright of every woman.'" She looked up from the pages of *The Household Guardian* as she made this impressive announcement. Rosemary was busy in the kitchen, and Miss Matilda sat at the other window mending a three-cornered tear in last year's brown alpaca.

"'The first necessity of beauty is an erect carriage,'" she continued.

"That lets us out," commented Matilda, "not havin' any carriage at all."

"Frank used to say," said Grandmother, irrelevantly, "that he always had his own carriage until his Pa and me got tired of pushin' it."

"What kind of a carriage is an erect carriage?" queried Matilda, biting off her thread.

"I ain't never heard tell of 'em," replied Grandmother, cautiously, "but I should think, from the sound of it, that it was some kind that was to be driv' standin' up."

The Power of Ages

"Then I 've seen 'em."

"Where?" Grandmother lowered her spectacles to the point where they rested upon the wart and peered disconcertingly at Matilda. The upper part of the steel frames crossed her eyeballs horizontally, giving her an uncanny appearance.

"At the circus, when Pa took us. After the whole show was over they had what they called a chariot race, and women driv' around the tent in little two-wheeled carts, standin' up."

"Matilda Starr! 'T ain't no such thing!"

Matilda shrugged her shoulders with an air of finality. "All right," she returned, with cold sarcasm, "as long as you see it and I did n't."

"'Beauty has been the power of the ages,'" Grandmother continued, taking refuge once more in *The Household Guardian*. "'Cleopatra and Helen of Troy changed the map of the world by their imperial loveliness.'"

"I did n't know imps was lovely," Matilda remarked, frowning at the result of her labours. "I reckon I 'll have to set a piece in at the corner, where it 's puckerin'."

"Ain't I always told you that the only way to mend a three-cornered tear was to set a piece in? Some folks never get old enough to learn anything. Even Frank's wife would have known better 'n that."

Cleopatra

"Never mind Frank's wife," returned Matilda, somewhat hurriedly. "Let her rest in her grave and go on readin' about the lovely imps."

"It does n't say imps is lovely. It says 'imperial loveliness.'"

"Well, ain't that the same thing?"

"No, it ain't. Imperial means empire."

"Then why ain't it spelled so? Imperial begins with an *i* and so does imp, and, accordin' to what I learned when I went to school, empire begins with an *e*."

There seemed to be no adequate reply to this, so Grandmother went on: "If Cleopatra's nose had been an inch longer, where would Egypt have been now?"

"Where 't is, I reckon," Matilda returned, seeing that an answer was expected.

"No, it would n't."

"Why not?"

"I don't know why not, but if it would n't have made no difference, the man that wrote the piece would n't have asked about it."

"Well, then, let him answer it himself, as long as he knows."

"'Wars have been fought over beautiful women,'" Grandmother resumed, "'and will continue to be till the end of time.'"

"What about Egypt?" interrupted Matilda.

"I ain't come to that yet. Let me alone, can't you? 'Every mother should begin with

The Paper's Circulation

her child almost from the moment of birth. Projecting ears can be corrected by the wearing of a simple cap, and a little daily attention to the nose in the way of gentle pinching with the fingers, will insure the proper shape. This of course, must be done while the cartilage is easily pushed into the proper position.'"

"While the what?" Matilda demanded.

"Cart-i-lage. It means before the child has outgrown its buggy. 'Teeth and complexion are to be considered later, but must be looked after carefully. Every woman should bear in mind the fact that a good complexion comes from the inside.'"

"The man what wrote that piece ain't got the slightest idea of what he 's talkin' about."

Grandmother transfixed Matilda with an icy stare. Then, turning to the last page of the paper, she read, with due attention to emphasis: "'*The Household Guardian* is read every week in more than one million homes. Averaging five people to each family, this means that five million people, every Thursday, are eagerly watching for the regular issue of *The Household Guardian*.' If he don't know what he 's talkin' about, why are five million people waitin' for the paper? Answer me that, Matilda Starr, if you can!"

"There ain't five in every family," Matilda objected. "That means the Pa and Ma and three children."

"Maybe not. Maybe it 's the Ma and Pa and two children and an Aunt or an Uncle or some other of the family connection."

"Well, even if there 's only two children, if their Ma is makin' 'em caps to hold back their ears and pinchin' their noses regular, she ain't got no time to have her own nose flattened out against the glass lookin' for *The Household Guardian*."

"'If, however, through ignorance or the press of other occupations,'" Grandmother resumed, clearing her throat, "'this early care has not been given, every woman, no matter what her circumstances are, may at least be well-groomed.'"

Matilda giggled hysterically.

"What 's the matter now?" queried Grandmother, with interest.

"I was just thinkin' about the erect carriage and the groomin'. The man what wrote that piece seems to think a woman is a horse. Reckon I 'll get myself a curry-comb."

"It might improve the looks of your hair some if you did," the old lady observed, caustically. "'No woman is so poor that she cannot take the time to attend to her personal appearance, nor so rich that she can afford to neglect it. The hair should be shampooed at —Continued on page sixty-seven.'"

"The hair should be what?"

"'Shampooed at least once a month.'"

Face Massage

"What 's that?"

"Don't interrupt," commanded the old lady, with the dull red burning on her withered cheeks. "Here I am readin' to you and tryin' to improve your mind and all the time you 're interruptin' me."

"Only to ask questions," Matilda returned, with affected submission. "If I 'm to have my mind improved I want it well done."

"'In the intervals it should be frequently brushed, and the regular weekly face massage' —that 's printed wrong—'the regular weekly face message should not be neglected.'"

"What 's a face message?" asked Matilda, curiosity overcoming prudence.

"Anything that 's said to anybody, I suppose. Now don't speak to me again. 'The nails must also be taken care of and one or two visits to a good manicure will show any woman how it is to be done. The implements are not expensive and will last——'"

"What 's a manicure?"

"Some kind of a doctor, I reckon,—'and will last a long time. A few simple exercises should be taken every night and morning to preserve the fig—Continued on page seventy.'"

"Preservin' figs ain't any particular exercise," Matilda observed, shaking out the mended skirt. "You can do most of it settin' down."

"'Preserve the figure,'" Grandmother con-

Cucumber Milk

tinued with emphasis. "'Soap and hot water may be used on the face if a good cold cream is well rubbed into the pores immediately afterward.'"

"Vanilla or lemon?" Matilda asked.

"It does n't say ice-cream, it just says cold cream. 'Cucumber milk is excellent for freckles or tan, and——'"

"I reckon I won't hear no more," said Matilda. Her lips were compressed into a thin tight line. "I can stand the carriages that are to be driv' standin' up, and the lovely imps and the nose pinchin' and the caps for the ears, but when it comes to goin' out every mornin' to milk the cucumbers, I don't feel called on to set and listen to it. The man what wrote that piece was as crazy as a loon, and if five million people read his paper every week, four million, nine hundred and ninety-nine thousand and nine hundred and ninety-nine of 'em know it. I ain't sayin' who 's the one that don't."

She sailed majestically out of the room with her head held high, and her frowsy grey hair bristling with indignation. Grandmother's lower jaw dropped in amazement for a moment, then she returned to the paper. "Millkin' the cucumbers don't seem quite right," she said to herself, "but there it is in print, as plain as day."

For the first time her faith in the printed

Grandmother Sees the Stranger

word wavered. "Maybe there 's some special kind of cucumber," she mused, "that gives milk. We used to hear 'em called cowcumbers. Why 'd they be called that if they did n't give milk? There 's only the two kinds as far as I know—the tame and wild, and the wild ones—" The light of pure intellectual joy dawned upon the puzzled old face. "Of course. Don't I remember the white sticky juice inside the wild ones? That 's it! Wait till I tell Matilda!"

Triumphantly she returned to *The Household Guardian,* and, in her new allegiance, read every line of every advertisement before folding it carefully and putting it away with the others. "Good for freckles and tan," she said to herself, meditatively, "but it did n't say nothin' about warts. Maybe that 'll be in next week's paper."

While she sat looking out of the window a woman passed, walking so slowly that Grandmother had plenty of time to observe her. As the stranger turned her head neither to the right nor the left, the old lady's intense scrutiny was attended by no embarrassment.

From the fragmentary description that had come her way, she at once recognised Mrs. Lee—the tall, straight figure in a gown of pale green linen, the dainty, regular features, and the crown of wonderful hair, radiating sunlit splendour, as she wore no hat.

Ready Money

A letter in her hand betrayed the object of her passing. "She 's goin' to the post-office," Grandmother mused, "and if she comes back this way, I 'll see her again. Matilda ain't seen her but twice and then she had a hat on."

Mrs. Lee did, indeed, come back that way, but gave no sign that she saw, or even felt, the presence of the keen observer in the window of the little brown house. Grandmother hoped that Matilda was not peering from an upper window. Perhaps she would tell her immediately, and perhaps she would n't. While she was considering this point, Rosemary came in, wiping her hands upon her apron, and announced that she was ready to go to the store.

Rapidly giving a list of the articles desired, Grandmother rose from her chair, lifted her skirts, and from some safe inner pocket, drew out a black bag, which was evidently fastened around her waist with a string. This bag contained another, closely wrapped. Inside was a much worn leather "wallet," from which Grandmother extracted a two-dollar bill and some pennies.

"Run along, Rosemary. I reckon that 'll be enough."

Rosemary obeyed, privately wondering for the thousandth time whence came Grandmother's money. Neither she nor Matilda had ever dared to ask, but when the supply gave

It Seemed Odd

out, the old lady always produced a twenty-dollar gold piece from the magic bag.

When she returned from her errand, Aunt Matilda was nowhere to be seen, and Grandmother, nodding in her chair by the window, had not been awakened by the opening and closing of the door. Rosemary went up-stairs, and, from sounds that penetrated the hall through the closed door of Aunt Matilda's room, inferred that she also was taking an afternoon nap.

If she could only write to Alden, and tell him he was free! Night after night she had pondered over ways and means. It seemed odd that in a house where there was always plenty to eat and to wear, of a certain sort, stationery and stamps should be practically unknown. Grandmother had used the last sheet of paper and the last envelope when she ordered the bolt of brown alpaca, and with stern suspicion held Rosemary to account for every penny with which she was entrusted.

If she had paper and an envelope, perhaps she might ask the storekeeper to send the note up with the Marshs' groceries, or, better yet, she might go up to the house herself very early some morning or very late some night and slip it under the front door. In that way, she would be sure he received it. Rosemary brightened as she saw that a stamp would not really be necessary after all.

Rosemary Takes Possession of the Box

If only, among her mother's things in the attic, there might be an envelope! She could use brown wrapping paper to write upon, if worst came to worst—the storekeeper might even give her a small, fresh piece of the pale yellow sort. Rosemary knew every separate article in the trunk, however, even the inlaid box to which the key was missing. She had never dared to ask for the key, much less to break open the box, but to-day, the courage of desperation sustained her and she ran quickly up-stairs.

Long afternoon sunbeams, sweet with June, came into the attic, and made fairy gold of the dust as they entered the room. It had none of the charm which belongs to every well-regulated attic; it was merely a storehouse, full of cobwebs and dust. A few old trunks were stored there, all empty save the small hair-cloth trunk which held Rosemary's mother's few possessions that had outlived her.

She opened, it, found the box, and discovered that she had forgotten the scissors with which she intended to break the lock. She wondered whether she might safely risk the trip down-stairs after the scissors, or whether it would be better to take the box with her and hide it in her room. Before she had made up her mind, she heard a slow, heavy tread upon the stair.

She could not go down and she did not wish

Hidden Gold

to be found with the box—indeed, she dared not. She cowered back under the eaves and lay flat on the floor behind the trunk, just as Grandmother came into the attic.

For a moment the old lady paused, her keen eyes searching the room as though she felt a presence which she did not see. Rosemary lay very quietly upon the floor, though fearing that the loud beating of her heart might be heard in the stillness.

Reassured, and not in the least lame, Grandmother went to the brick chimney that came up through the attic, and mounted a decrepit chair. She scratched and pried at a certain brick with her scissors, then removed it quietly. Reaching in, she drew out a black bag, whence came a sound of tinkling metal. Rosemary, peering around the corner of the trunk, could scarcely believe the evidence of her own senses.

Grandmother took out a twenty-dollar gold piece, restored the bag to its place, put the brick back, and went down-stairs with the quiet, stealthy movement of a cat.

Presently Rosemary went down-stairs also, with the box, stopping to leave it in her own room. Cold with excitement, she trembled when she went into the kitchen and began to make preparations for supper. She heard warring voices in the sitting-room, then Grandmother came to the kitchen door.

"Oh," she said. "So you came in the back way. I did n't hear you come in. Reckon I must have been asleep."

The Old Photograph

Rosemary did not answer. She longed to be alone in her own room with the inlaid box, which now assumed a mystery and portent it had never had before, but it was almost midnight before, by the flickering light of a candle-end, she broke it open, smothering the slight sound with the patch-work quilt.

She hoped for stationery, but there was none. It contained an old photograph and a letter addressed to Grandmother Starr. Rosemary leaned to the light with the photograph, studying it eagerly. It was old and faded, but the two were still distinct—a young woman in an elaborate wedding gown, standing beside a man who was sitting upon an obviously uncomfortable chair.

The man, in a way, resembled Grandmother Starr; the lady looked like Rosemary, except that she was beautiful. "Father!" cried Rosemary, in an agonising whisper. "Mother!" Face to face at last with those of her own blood, dead though they were!

The little mother was not more than two or three and twenty: the big strong father was about twenty-five. She had never been shown the picture, nor had even guessed its existence, Since she was old enough to think about it all,

Her Father's Letter

she had wondered what her father and mother looked like.

Thrilled with a new, mysterious sense of kinship, she dwelt lovingly upon every line of the pictured faces, holding the photograph safely beyond the reach of the swift-falling tears. She was no longer fatherless, motherless; alone. Out of the dust of the past, like some strangely beautiful resurrection, these two had come to her, richly dowered with personality.

It was late when she put down the picture and took up the letter, which was addressed to Grandmother Starr. She took it out of the envelope, unfolded the crackling, yellowed pages, and read:

"Dear Mother;

"Since writing to you yesterday that I was going up north on the *Clytie*, I have been thinking about the baby, and that it might be wise to provide for her as best I can in case anything should happen to me. So I enclose a draft for eleven thousand five hundred dollars made payable to you. I have realised on my property here, but this is all I have aside from my passage-money and a little more, and, if I land safely, I shall probably ask you to return at least a large part of it.

"But, if the ship should go down, as I sincerely hope it won't, she will be sure of this,

The Truth of the Matter

for her clothing and education. In case anything should happen to her, of course I would want you and Matilda to have the money, but if it does n't, give Rosemary everything she needs or wants while the money lasts, and oh, mother, be good to my little girl!

"Your loving son,

"Frank."

In a flash of insight Rosemary divined the truth The gold hidden behind the loose brick in the chimney was hers, given to her by her dead father. And she had not even a postage stamp!

But swiftly her anger died away in joy—a joy that surged and thrilled through her as some white, heavenly fire that warmed her inmost soul. Not alone, but cared for—sheltered, protected, loved. "Oh," breathed Rosemary, with her eyes shining; "Father, dear father—my father, taking care of me!" Then, in her thought, she added, without dreaming of irreverence, "I think God must be like that!"

XVI

One Little Hour

The Two Faces

WHEN she awoke in the morning it was with a bewildering sense of change. Something had happened, and, in the first moment, she was not quite sure whether a dream had not boldly overstepped the line into daylight. The faded photograph, propped up on the table at the head of her bed, at once reassured her, and Rosemary smiled, with a joy so great that it was almost pain tugging at the fibres of her heart.

To an outsider, perhaps, the two faces would have been common enough, but one of love's divinest gifts is the power to bestow beauty wherever it goes. The old man, bent with years, with the snows of his fourscore winters lying heavily upon his head, may seem an object of kindly pity as he hobbles along with crutch or cane, going oh, so slowly, where once his feet were fain to run from very joy of living. The light may be gone from his faded eyes, his dull ears may not respond to question or call, but one face, waiting at a window, shall

Beauty the Twin of Love

illumine at the sight of him, and one voice, thrilling with tenderness, shall stir him to eager answer.

Or a woman, worn and broken, her rough hands made shapeless by toil, may seem to have no claim to beauty as the word is commonly understood. Sleepless nights, perchance, have dimmed her eyes, suffering and sacrifice have seamed and marked her face, but those to whom she has given herself see only the great nobleness of her nature, the royalty of her soul. For the beauty of the spirit may transfigure its earth-bound temple, as some vast and grey cathedral with light streaming from its stained glass windows, and eloquent with chimes and singing, may breathe incense and benediction upon every passer-by.

And so, for those to whom love has come, beauty has come also, but merely as the reflection in the mirror, since only love may see and understand the thing itself. Purifying, uplifting, and exalting, making sense the humble servant and not the tyrannical master, renewing itself for ever at divine fountains that do not fail, inspiring to fresh sacrifice, urging onward with new courage, redeeming all mistakes with its infinite pardon; this, indeed is Love, which neither dies nor grows old. And, since God himself is Love, what further assurance do we require of immortality?

Upon the two in the faded picture the most

Effects of the Picture

exquisite mystery of life had wrought its transfiguration. Vaguely conscious of the unfamiliar and uncomfortable chair in which he sat, the young man looked out upon Rosemary, bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh, with an all-embracing, all-understanding love. It came to her with a sense of surprise that father was only a little older than she was; he had paused, and she, receiving the gift of life from him, had gone on. And the little mother, brave in her white satin, with her long veil trailing down from her wreath of orange blossoms; she too, loved Rosemary; indeed, with a holy deepening of her soul, she loved the whole world.

The picture must have been taken very soon after the ceremony. Rosemary fancied that they had gone to the photographer's with one or more of the wedding guests, while the revelry and feasting still went on. And yet, so soon, into the woman's eyes had come the look of wistfulness, almost of prayer, as though she had suddenly come face to face with the knowledge that love, like a child, is man's to give and woman's to keep, to guard, to nourish, to suffer for, and, perhaps, last of all, to lose.

The mother-hunger woke in Rosemary a strange longing. What joy to serve this little mother, to whom her child was as unknown then as now! What ecstasy to uncoil the smooth strands of brown hair, take the white

shoes from the tiny feet, destined to tread the unfamiliar ways of pain; to breathe the soft sweetness of her neck and arms! The big, strong father, lovably boyish now, appealed to her with a sense of shelter, for valiantly he stood, or had tried to stand, between his child and the world, but, from the other came something more.

"I think," said Rosemary, to herself, "that she must have kissed me before she died."

That day she went about her tasks as might a dweller from another planet, who had set his body to carry on his appointed duties, while his spirit roamed the blue infinite spaces between the day-stars and the sun. Early in the afternoon she left the house, without asking whether she might go, or saying when she would be back. She even had the audacity to leave the luncheon dishes piled in the sink, and unwashed.

At the foot of the Hill of the Muses, she paused, then shook her head. She could never go there again, though the thought of Alden now brought no anguish—only a great sadness. A mocking smile curled her lips at the memory of her futile struggles toward stationery and a stamp, that she might set him free. How could he be more free than he was, untroubled, doubtless, by even the thought of her?

She began to perceive, though dimly, the divinity that shapes our humblest affairs. In

A Clear Path

the search for an envelope, she had found her father and mother, as was doubtless meant from the beginning. Surely she had never needed them more than she did now! If it had been meant for her to have stationery, and to set Alden free in that way, it would have been mysteriously provided—she was certain of that.

She saw, too, that the way upon which we are meant to go is always clear, or at least indicated, at the time we are meant to take it; that guidance is definitely felt through the soul's own overpowering conviction. The struggle and the terror fell away from her like a garment she had cast aside, and for the moment she emerged into freedom as before she had come into love.

Deep in her heart she still loved Alden, but unselfishly. This new Rosemary asked nothing for herself, she only longed to give, though freedom might be her best gift to him. Harm could come to her only through herself; the burning heart and the racked soul had been under the dominion of Fear.

She took the path up along the river, that lay half asleep and crooning drowsily to the little clouds that were mirrored upon its tranquil breast. Tiny blue pools among the rushes at the bend in the stream gave back glints of sapphire and turquoise, with now and then a glimmer of gold. Sometimes, upon a

Pleasures of the Valley

hidden rock, the river swirled and rippled, breaking murmurously into silver and pearl, but steadily beneath, in spite of all outward seeming, the current moved endlessly toward its sea-born destiny, as Man himself unto the Everlasting.

Singing among the far hills, and rushing downward in a torrent of ecstatic life, the river had paused in the valley to rest, dreaming, perchance, of the long cool shadows in the uplands, the far altar-fires of daybreak. There were pleasant things to do in the valley, to lie at full length, basking in the sun, to hum a bit of the old music, to touch gently the harp-strings of the marsh grass and rushes, dimpling with pleasure at the faint answer, to reflect every passing mood of cloud and sky, even to hold the little clouds as a mother might, upon its deep and tender bosom. There were lily-pads to look after, too, bird-shadows and iridescent dragon flies, sunset lights to deepen and spread afar, and, at night, all the starry hosts of heaven to receive and give back, in luminous mist, to the waiting dusk.

Dawn came to the river while the earth still slept; it was day upon the waters while night lingered upon the shore. And, too, long after the abundant life of field and meadow was stilled in dreamless peace, past the power of the fairy lamp-bearers to stir or to annoy, the river lay awake and watchful, as some

Murmur of Voices

divinely appointed guardian of the Soul of Things.

The peace of it came to Rosemary, as she walked, with the sense of healing, of balm. She saw plainly how Grandmother had wronged her, every day of her life, but set resentment aside, simply, as something that did not belong to her. The appointed thing came at the appointed time in the appointed way—there was no terror save her own fear. Outside herself was a mass of circumstance beyond her control, but, within herself, was the power of adjustment, as, when two dominant notes are given, the choice of the third makes either dissonance or harmony.

Tired, at last, for she had walked far upstream into the hills, Rosemary sat down upon a convenient rock to rest. The shores were steep, now, but just beyond her was a little cleft between two hills—a pleasant, sunny space, with two or three trees and a great rock, narrowing back into a thicket. She went on, after a few moments, down the slope to the level place, lay at full length upon the thick turf, and drank thirstily from the river.

In a moment, she heard the slow splash of oars, and the murmur of voices, both low and deep, though one evidently belonged to a man and one to a woman. Boats were infrequent upon the river, and, not caring to be seen, she

stepped back into the thicket until it should pass.

Mute and Frightened

The voices came nearer and nearer, the man's full-toned and vaguely familiar, the woman's musical, vibrant, and, in a way, familiar too.

A single powerful stroke brought the boat into view, as it rounded the curve. It was Alden and Edith. The girl stepped back still farther into the sheltering thicket, repressing the cry of astonishment that rose to her lips. Acutely self-conscious, it seemed that the leaves were no protection; that she stood before them helpless, unconcealed.

Trembling, she sat down on a low, flat stone, for she had suddenly become too weak to stand. Much to her dismay, Alden swung the head of the boat toward the shore. They were going to land!

Mute and frightened, she watched him as he assisted her to the shore, saw him return to the boat for a basket covered with a white cloth, and draw the oars up to the bank.

Rosemary instantly comprehended the emotions of an animal in a trap. She scarcely dared to breathe, much less move. Unwilling to listen, she put her fingers in her ears and turned her head away, but presently the position became so strained and uncomfortable that she had to give it up. Their voices were plainly audible.

A picnic

"I thought I heard a rustle behind that thicket," said Edith. She was lovely in her gown of pale green linen, and carried a white linen parasol instead of wearing a hat.

"It 's a bird, or a squirrel," he assured her. "Nobody ever comes here."

"Are we nobody?"

"Indeed not—we 're everybody. The world was made just for us two."

"I wish I could believe you," Edith returned, sadly. Then she added, with swift irrelevance: "Why do people always take hard-boiled eggs to picnics?"

"To mitigate the pickles," he responded. "There always are pickles—see? I knew Mother would put some in."

"Wine, too," commented Edith, peering into the basket. "Why, it 's almost a party!"

Alden's face took on a grave, sweet boyishness. "I did that myself," he said. "Mother did n't know. Wait until I tell you. The day I was born, my father set aside all the wine that was that day ready for bottling. There was n't much of it. All these years, it 's been untouched on one particular shelf in the storeroom, waiting, in dust and cobwebs. At sunset he went to Mother, and told her what he had done. 'It 's for the boy,' he said. 'It 's to be opened the day he finds the woman he loves as I love you.'"

"And—" Edith's voice was almost a whisper.

The Time Has Come

"The time has come. I may have found her only to lose her again, but she 's mine—for to-day."

He filled two small glasses, and, solemnly, they drank. The light mood vanished as surely as though they had been in a church, at some unwonted communion. Behind the leafy screen, Rosemary trembled and shook. She felt herself sharply divided into a dual personality. One of her was serene and calm, able to survey the situation unemotionally, as though it were something that did not concern her at all. The other was a deeply passionate, loving woman, who had just seen her life's joy taken from her for ever.

Alden, leaning back against the rock near which they sat, was looking at Edith as a man looks at but one woman in all his life. To Rosemary, trembling and cold, it someway brought a memory of her father's face, in the faded picture. At the thought, she clenched her hands tightly and compressed her lips. So much she had, made hers eternally by a grave. No one could take from her the thrilling sense of kinship with those who had given her life.

Edith looked out upon the river. Her face was wistful and as appealing as a child's. "Found," she repeated, "though only to lose again."

"Perhaps not," he answered, hopefully. "Wait and see."

Never Again

"Life is made of waiting," she returned, sadly—"woman's life always is." Then with a characteristically quick change of mood, she added, laughingly: "I know a woman who says that all her life, before she was married, she was waiting for her husband, and that since her marriage, she has noticed no difference."

Alden smiled at the swift anti-climax, then his face grew grave again. He packed the few dishes in the basket, rinsed the wine glasses in the river, brought them back, and gave one to Edith.

"We 'll break the bottle," he said, "and the glasses, too. They shall never be used again."

The shattered crystal fell, tinkling as it went. The wine made a deep, purple stain upon the stone. He opened his arms.

"No," whispered Edith. "It only makes it harder, when——"

"Beloved, have you found so much sweetness in the world that you can afford to pass it by?" She did not answer, so he said, pleadingly: "Don't you want to come?"

She turned toward him, her face suddenly illumined. "I do, with all my soul I do."

"Then come. For one little hour—for one dear hour—ah, dearest, come!"

Rosemary averted her face, unable to bear it. When she turned her miserable eyes toward them again, allured by some strange fascination she was powerless to analyse,

Yours Alone

Edith was in his arms, her mouth crushed to his.

"Dear, dearest, sweetheart, beloved!" the man murmured. "I love you so!"

There was a pause, then he spoke again. "Do you love me?"

"Yes," she breathed. "A thousand times, yes!"

"Say it," he pleaded. "Just those three words."

"I love you," she answered, "for everything you have been and everything you are and everything you are going to be, for always. I love you with a love that is yours alone. It never belonged to anybody else for the merest fraction of a second, and never can. It was born for you, lives for you, and will die when you need it no more."

"Ah," he said, "but I need it always. I 've wanted you all my life."

"And will," she sighed, trying to release herself.

"Edith! Don't! I can't bear it! Take the golden hour as the glittering sands of eternity sweep past us. So much is yours and mine, out of all that is past and to come."

"As you wish," she responded. Then, after another pause, she said: "Don't you want to read to me?"

Rosemary, dumb and hopeless, saw them sit down, close together, and lean against the

The Red Book Again

rock, where the sunlight made an aureole of Edith's hair. He slipped his arm around her, and she laid her head upon his shoulder, with a look of heavenly peace upon her pale face. Never had the contrast between them been more painful than now, for Edith, with love in her eyes, was exquisite beyond all words.

Alden took a small red book out of his pocket. With a pang, Rosemary recognised it. Was nothing to be left sacred to her? She longed to break from her hiding-place, face them both with stern accusing eyes, snatch the book which meant so much to her—ask for this much, at least, to keep. Yet she kept still, and listened helplessly, with the blood beating in her ears.

In his deep, musical voice, Alden read once more: *Her Gifts*. "That," he said, softly, "was the night I knew."

"Yes," Edith answered. "The night I found the book and brought it home."

Rosemary well remembered when Edith had found the book. Her strange sense of a dual self persisted, yet, none the less, her heart beat hard with pain.

He went on, choosing a line here and there as he turned the marked pages, but avoiding entirely some of the most beautiful sonnets because of their hopelessness. At last, holding her closer, he began:

Putting the Action to the Words

"On this sweet bank your head thrice sweet and dear
I lay, and spread your hair on either side,
And see the new-born woodflowers bashful-eyed
Look through the golden tresses here and there.
On these debatable borders of the year
Spring's foot half falters; scarce she yet may know
The leafless blackthorn-blossom from the snow;
And through her bowers the wind's way still is clear."

"Oh!" breathed Rosemary, with her hands tightly clenched. "Dear God, have pity!"

Heedlessly, Alden went on:

"But April's sun strikes down the glades to-day;
So shut your eyes upturned, and feel my kiss
Creep, as the Spring now thrills through every spray,
Up your warm throat to your warm lips; for this——"

He dropped the book, lifted Edith's chin and kissed her throat, then her mouth. She laid her hand upon his face. "Dear and lonely and hungry-hearted," she said; "how long you wanted me!"

"Yes," he murmured, "but I 've found you now!"

How long they sat there, Rosemary never knew, for her senses were dulled. She did not hear their preparations for departure, but saw the boat swinging out into the current, with the sunset making golden glory of the river and of Edith's hair. When the sound of the oars ceased, she rose, numb and cold, and came out into the open space. She steadied herself

Another Thought

for a moment upon the rock against which they had leaned.

"Service," she said to herself, "and sacrifice. Giving, and not receiving. Asking—not answer." Yet she saw that, even now, this could be neither sacrifice nor denial, because it was something she had never had.

She laughed, a trifle bitterly, and went on home, another thought keeping time with her footsteps. "The appointed thing comes at the appointed time in the appointed way. There is no terror save my own fear."

XVII

The Last Tryst

THE shrill voices in the sitting-room rose higher and higher. Since the day Grandmother had read the article upon "Woman's Birthright" to Matilda, the subject of Mrs. Lee's hair had, as it were, been drowned in cucumber milk. When Rosemary came in from the kitchen, they appealed to her by common consent.

A Double Self

"Rosemary, have you ever heard of anybody taking a stool and a pail and goin' out to milk the cucumbers before breakfast?" This from Aunt Matilda.

"Rosemary, ain't you seen the juice of wild cucumbers when they spit their seeds out and ain't it just like milk, only some thicker?" This from Grandmother.

"I don't know," Rosemary answered, mechanically. The queer sense of a double self persisted. One of her was calm and content, the other was rebellious—and hurt.

"Humph!" snorted Grandmother.

"Humph!" echoed Aunt Matilda.

Going for the Paper

"It 's Thursday," Grandmother reminded her, " and I heard the mail train come in some time ago. You 'd better leave the sweepin' an' go and get my paper."

"Yes, do," Aunt Matilda chimed in, with a sneer. "I can't hardly wait for this week's paper, more 'n the other sufferin' five million can. Maybe there 'll be a pattern for a cucumber milkin' stool in this week's paper; somethin' made out of a soap-box, with cucumber leaves and blossoms painted on it with some green and yellow house paint that happens to be left over. And," she continued, "they 'd ought to be a pail too, but I reckon a tin can 'll do, for the cucumbers I 've seen so far don't look as if they 'd be likely to give much milk. We can paint the can green and paste a picture of a cucumber on the outside from the seed catalogue. Of course I ain't got any freckles, but there 's nothin' like havin' plenty of cucumber milk in the house, with hot weather comin' on."

Grandmother surveyed Matilda with a penetrating, icy stare. "You 've got freckles on your mind," she said. "Rosemary, will you go to the post-office and not keep me waiting?"

The girl glanced at her brown gingham dress, and hesitated.

"You 're clean enough," Grandmother observed, tartly. "Anybody 'd think you had a beau waitin' for you somewheres."

She flushed to her temples, but did not speak. Her face was still red when she went out, wearing a brown straw hat three Summers old.

"The paper says," Grandmother continued, "that a blush is becomin' to some women, but Rosemary ain't one that looks well with a red face. Do you suppose she has got a beau?"

"Can't prove it by me," Matilda sighed, looking pensively out of the window. "That Marsh boy come to see her once, though."

"He did n't come again, I notice, no more 'n the minister did."

"No," Matilda rejoined, pointedly, with a searching glance at Grandmother, "and I reckon it was for the same reason. When young folks comes to see young folks, they don't want old folks settin' in the room with 'em all the time, talkin' about things they ain't interested in."

"Young folks!" snorted Grandmother. "You was thirty!"

"That ought to be old enough to set alone with a man for a spell, especially if he 's a minister."

"I suppose you think," the old lady returned, swiftly gathering her ammunition for a final shot, "that the minister was minded to marry you. I 've told you more 'n once that you 're better off the way you are.

Face to Face

Marriage ain't much. I 've been through it and I know."

With that, she sailed triumphantly out of the room, closing the door with a bang which had in it the sound of finality. Poor Miss Matilda gazed dreamily out of the window, treasuring the faint, fragrant memory of her lost romance. "If Rosemary has got a beau," she said to herself, "I hope she won't let Ma scare him away from her."

At the post-office, Rosemary met Alden, face to face. She blushed and stammered when he spoke to her, answered his kindly questions in monosyllables, and, snatching *The Household Guardian* from the outstretched hand of the postmaster, hurried away.

Presently he overtook her. "Please, Rosemary," he said, "give me just a minute. I want to talk to you. I have n't seen you for a long time."

"Yes?" She stopped, but could not raise her eyes to his face.

"I can't talk to you here. Come on up the hill."

"When?" The girl's lips scarcely moved as she asked the question.

"Now. Please come."

"I 'll—I 'll have to go home first, with this," she replied, indicating the paper. "Then I 'll come."

"All right. I 'll go on ahead and wait for

Waiting for Rosemary

you. Shall I tie the red ribbon to the tree?" He spoke thoughtlessly, meaning only to be pleasant, but the girl's eyes filled. She shook her head decisively and neither of them spoke until they reached the corner where she must turn.

"Good-bye," she said.

"Auf wiedersehen," he replied, lifting his hat. "Don't be long."

Always, before, it had been Rosemary who waited for him. Now he sat upon the log, leaning back against the tree, listening to the chatter of the squirrels and the twitter of little birds in the boughs above him. It was not yet noon, and the sunlight made little dancing gleams of silver-gilt on the ground between the faint shadows of the leaves. He waited for her in a fever of impatience, for in his pocket he had a letter for Edith, addressed in a dashing masculine hand.

Not so long ago, in this same place, he had asked Rosemary to marry him. Now he must ask her to release him, to set him free from the bondage he had persisted in making for himself. He made a wry face at the thought, unspeakably dreading the coming interview and, in his heart, despising himself.

Rosemary did not keep him waiting long. When she came, she was flushed and breathless from the long climb—and something more.

The Hour of Reckoning

She sank down upon the seat he indicated—her old place.

"It 's been a long time since we were here last," Alden observed, awkwardly.

"Has it?" The grey eyes glanced at him keenly for a moment, then swiftly turned away.

"I 've—I 've wanted to see you," Alden lied.

"I 've wanted to see you," she flashed back, telling the literal truth.

Alden sighed, for there was tremulous passion in her tone—almost resentment. He had treated her badly, considering that she was his promised wife. She had been shamefully neglected, and she knew it, and the hour of reckoning had come.

For the moment he caught at the straw the situation seemed to offer him. If they should quarrel—if he could make her say harsh things, it might be easier. Instantly his better self revolted. "Coward!" he thought. "Cad!"

"I 've wanted to see you," Rosemary was saying, with forced calmness, "to tell you something. I can't marry you, ever!"

"Why, Rosemary!" he returned, surprised beyond measure. "What do you mean?"

The girl rose and faced him. He rose, too, awkwardly stretching out his hand for hers. She swerved aside, and clasped her hands behind her back.

"I mean what I said; it 's plain enough, is n't it?"

"Yes," he answered, putting his hands in his pockets, "it 's perfectly plain. If I 've done anything to hurt or offend you in any way, I—I 'm sorry." So much was true. He was sorry for Rosemary and had never been more so than at that very moment. "You 'll give me a reason, won't you?" he continued.

"Reason?" she repeated, with a bitter laugh. "Oh, I have plenty of reasons!" His heart sank for a moment, then went on, evenly. "It 's all a mistake—it 's never been anything but a mistake. I could n't leave Grandmother and Aunt Matilda, you know. They need me, and I should n't have allowed myself to forget it."

"Yes," Alden agreed, quickly, "I suppose they do need you. I was selfish, perhaps."

Hot words came to her lips but she choked them back. For an instant she was tempted to tell him all she had seen and heard a few days before, to accuse him of disloyalty, and then prove it. Her face betrayed her agitation, but Alden was looking out across the valley, and did not see. In his pocket the letter for Edith lay consciously, as though it were alive.

"It is n't that you don't love me, is it?" he asked, curiously. His masculine vanity had been subtly aroused.

They Part

Rosemary looked him straight in the face. She was white, now, to the lips. "Yes," she lied. "It is that more than anything else."

"Why, my dear girl! I thought——"

"So did I. We were both mistaken, that is all."

"And you really don't love me?"

"Not in the least."

Alden laughed—a little mirthless, mocking laugh. It is astonishing, sometimes, how deeply a man may be hurt through his vanity. Rosemary had turned away, and he called her back.

"Won't you kiss me good-bye?" he asked, with a new humility.

Then Rosemary laughed, too, but her laugh was also mirthless. "No," she answered, in a tone from which there was no appeal. "Why should I?" Before he realised it, she was gone.

He went back to the log and sat down to think. This last tryst with Rosemary had been a surprise in more ways than one. He had been afraid that she would be angry, or hurt, and she had been neither. He had come to ask for freedom and she had given it to him without asking, because she could not leave Grandmother and Aunt Matilda, and because she did not love him. He could understand the first reason, but the latter seemed very strange. Yet Rosemary had looked him

straight in the face and he had never known her to lie. He had a new emotion toward her; not exactly respect, but something more than that.

A Letter for Edith

Then, with a laugh, he straightened his shoulders. He had what he wanted, though it had not come in the way he thought it would. If he had been obliged to ask her to release him, he would have felt worse than he did now. The letter in his pocket, heavy with portent, asserted itself imperiously. He hurried home, feeling very chivalrous.

Edith, cool and fresh in white linen, with one of the last of the red roses thrust into her belt, was rocking on the veranda, with a book in her lap which she had made no pretence of reading. Two or three empty chairs were near her, but Madame was nowhere to be seen. Alden handed her the letter. "I 'm free!" he said, exultantly.

Edith smiled, then, with shaking hands, tore open the letter. Alden eagerly watched her as she turned the closely written pages, but her face was inscrutable. She read every word carefully, until she reached the signature. Then she looked up.

"I 'm not," she said, briefly. She tossed the letter to him, and went into the house. He heard her light feet upon the stairs and the rustle of her skirts as she ascended. Perfume persisted in the place she had just left—

Alden Reads the Letter.

the rose at her belt, the mysterious blending of many sweet odours, and, above all, the fragrance of Edith herself.

"It 's nonsense," he murmured, looking after her. All her quixotic notions of honour would eventually yield to argument—of course they would. Yet his heart strangely misgave him as he read the letter.

"My dear Edith," it began.

"Your letter has somewhat surprised me, and yet I cannot say I feel that I don't deserve it. Since you have been away I have been doing a good deal of thinking. Of course you and I have n't hit it off very well together, and, as I can see no point where you have failed me, I realise that it must be my fault and that I have failed you.

"I wish you had talked to me about it, instead of going away, and yet, even as I write the words, I see how impossible it would have been, for we have n't been in the habit of talking things over since the first year we were married. Gradually the wall of silence and reserve has grown up between us, but while you, with the quicker insight of a woman, have seen it growing, I have n't realised it until it was completed.

"Your offering me my freedom has made me wonder what my life would be without you. No one has ever filled your place to me, or ever will. I may have seemed careless,

The Husband's Point of View

thoughtless—indeed, I have been both, and constantly, but always in the background has been the knowledge that you were there—that I could depend upon you.

"It may seem like a trite and commonplace thing to say, but upon my word and honour, Edith, I have n't meant to fail you, as I see I have in a thousand ways. I 'm sorry, deeply sorry, but I know that the words will not mean much to you.

"Since I first saw you, there 's never been any woman in the world for me but you, and there never will be, even though you should cast me off as I deserve. If you can make up your mind to come back to me and let me try again, I 'll do my best to make you happy—to consider you instead of myself.

"Men are selfish brutes at the best, and I don't claim to be any better than the average, but all I 'm asking for now is a chance to make myself worthy of you—to be the sort of husband a woman like you should have.

"Please let me hear from you very soon.

"Your loving husband,

"W. G. L."

Alden read it again, though he did not need to—he had understood every word of it the first time. Then he folded it, slowly and precisely, and put it into the torn envelope. He tapped on the arm of the chair for a

Effect upon Alden

moment with the edge of the envelope, then, mechanically, put it into his pocket.

A robin, in a maple tree beyond him, piped his few notes with unbearable intensity. Discordant chirps assailed his ears from the lattice where the climbing rose put forth its few last blooms. Swaying giddily in a crazy pattern upon the white floor of the veranda, was the shadow of the rose, the plaything of every passing wind. He remembered the moonlight night which might have been either yesterday or in some previous life, as far as his confused perceptions went, when Edith had stood with the rose in her hand, and the clear, sharply-defined shadow of it had been silhouetted at her feet.

All his senses seemed mercilessly acute. Some of the roses were almost dead and the sickening scent of them mingled with the fragrance of those that had just bloomed. It made him dizzy—almost faint.

The maid announced luncheon, but food, or the sight of his mother were among the last things he desired, just then. Affecting not to hear, he went out, got a boat, and rowed far up the river alone.

When he was utterly exhausted, he shipped the oars and let himself drift back, pushing out from shore now and then when the current brought him too near. He knew, with crushing certainty, that Edith would not be swerved

A Silent Function

from her chosen path by argument—but he could at least try.

White-faced and weary, he went to his room when he reached home, lay down, and tried to sleep, but sleep would not come. He seemed to have come to a point of absolute bodily suspension, neither to hunger nor thirst nor sleep again. It was, in a way, like a clock, that ticks steadily, though the hands are definitely fixed at a certain hour and will not move.

He forced himself to dress for dinner and to go down at the proper time. Madame was waiting, but Edith was late. When she appeared, she was in the white linen gown she had worn all day, with the withered rose in her belt. It was the first evening she had not dressed for dinner and she at once apologised to Madame.

"I 'm sorry," she said, "but it seemed impossible to make the effort to-night. You 'll forgive me, won't you?"

"Of course," Madame returned sweetly.

"Of course," Alden echoed. His voice sounded distant and his eyes were dull.

As dinner bade fair to be a silent function, Madame turned to Edith with the first question that came into her mind.

"What have you been doing all the afternoon?"

"Packing," replied Edith, with dry lips.

Nothing to Say

"Or rather, getting ready to pack." She did not look at Alden, but at Madame, with a wan little smile that made the old lady's heart suddenly very tender toward her.

"My dear! We 'll miss you so."

"I know," Edith murmured, "and I shall miss you—more than words may say, but I have to go." She drained the glass of water at her plate, then added: "My husband wants me to come back. He has written to say so."

"Then," said Madame, "I suppose you will have to go. '

"I suppose so," repeated Edith, parrot-like.

Alden's eyes never swerved from Edith's white face. In their depths was the world-old longing, the world-old appeal, but never for the fraction of an instant did Edith trust herself to look at him.

When they rose from the table, Edith went back to her room immediately, murmuring an excuse. Alden watched her despairingly until the hem of her white gown was lost at the turn of the stairs. Then he sat down with the paper, but he could not read, for the words zig-zagged crazily along the page.

Madame understood and sincerely pitied them both, but there seemed to be nothing to say. She leaned back in her chair, with her eyes closed, pretending to be asleep, but, in reality, watching Alden as he stared vacantly at the paper he held in his shaking hands.

Poor Comfort

At last he rose and went out upon the veranda. Madame started from her chair, then forced herself to lean back again, calmly. She heard the scraping of his chair as he moved it along the veranda, out of the way of the light that came through the open window. For a long time there was silence.

Longing to comfort him and unable to endure it longer, Madame went out, softly. He did not hear her step, for his head was bowed upon his hands. From a room above Edith's light streamed out afar into the sweet darkness, drawing toward it all the winged wayfarers of the night.

Madame slipped her arm around his shoulders, and bent down to him. "Dear," she said brokenly, "she 's married."

Alden drew a quick, shuddering breath, and freed himself roughly from the tender clasp. "I know it, Mother," he cried, in a voice vibrant with pain. "For God's sake, don't remind me of that!"

XVIII

Starbreak

Edith's Failure

THROUGH the long night Edith lay awake, thinking. Her senses were blindly merged into one comprehensive hurt. She was as one who fares forth in darkness, knowing well the way upon which he must go, yet longing vainly for light.

Her path lay before her, mercilessly clear and distinct. A trick of memory took her back to what Madame had said, the day after she came: "The old way would have been to have waited, done the best one could, and trusted God to make it right in His good time." She remembered, too, her bitter answer: "I've waited and I've done the best I could, and I've trusted, but I've failed."

Keenly she perceived the subtlety of her punishment. Attempting to bind the Everlasting with her own personal limitations, her own desires, she had failed to see that at least half of a rightful prayer must deal with herself. She had asked only that her husband might love her; not that she might continue to love him.

Out of Harmony

Now, with her heart and soul wholly in the keeping of another man, the boon had been granted her, in bitterness and ashes and desolation. He had said, in his letter, that her coming away had made him think. Through her absence he had seen the true state of affairs between them, as she could never have made him see it if she had remained at home. This, then, was God's way of revelation to him, but —to her?

The truth broke upon her with the vividness of a lightning flash. It was the way of revelation to her also, but how? She sat up in bed, propping herself back against the pillows, her mind groping eagerly for the clue.

During the past six years she had endeavoured constantly for a certain adjustment. Now it had come, but she herself was out of harmony. Were her feet to be forever set upon the ways of pain? Was there nothing at all in the world for her?

Alden, too, was awake and thinking. She felt it, through the darkness, as definitely as though he had been in the same room, with his face full in the light. He also was conscious of the utter hopelessness of it and was striving to see his way clearly.

Until then, she had not known how far his argument had swayed her, nor how much she had depended upon the thought that her husband would gladly accept the release she

Irrevocably Bound

offered him. Her principles had not changed, but his possible point of view had not been considered before.

"'Until death do us part,' " said Edith, to herself. "Not 'until death or divorce do us part'; nor yet 'until I see someone else I like better'; not even 'until you see someone else you like better.' And, again, 'forsaking all others keep thee only unto me so long as we both shall live.' "

Suppose he had violated his oath, consented to accept freedom at her hands, and gone his way? Would not the solemn words she had spoken at the altar still be binding upon her? She saw, now, that they would be, and that whatever compromise he might have been able to make with his own conscience, to be legally justified later, she was irrevocably bound, until death should divide them one from the other.

She smiled sadly, for it was, indeed, a confused and muddled world. Things moved crazily, depending wholly upon blind chance. One works steadily, even for years, bending all his energies to one single point, and what is the result? Nothing! Another turns the knob of a door, walks into a strange room, or, perhaps, writes a letter, and from that moment his whole life is changed, for destiny lurks in hinges and abides upon the written page.

For days, for months even, no single action

may be significant, and again, upon another day, a thoughtless word, or even a look, may be as a pebble cast into deep waters, to reach, by means of ever-widening circles, some distant, unseen shore.

All this had come from a single sentence. Louise Archer, upon her death-bed, had harked back to her school days, and, thinking fondly of Virginia Marsh, had bade her daughter go to her if she felt the need of a mother's counsel when her own mother was past the power of giving it. Years afterward, during a day of despondency, Edith had remembered. The pebble had fallen deep and far and had become still again, but its final circle had that day touched the ultimate boundary made by three lives.

It had, of course, made no difference to Madame, but two men and a woman had been profoundly shaken by it, though not moved from their original position. They would all stay where they were, of course—Alden with his mother, and Edith with her husband. Then, with a shock, Edith remembered Rosemary—she was the one who had been swept aside as though by a tidal wave.

Poor Rosemary! Edith's heart throbbed with understanding pity for the girl who had lost all. She had not asked how it had happened, merely accepting Alden's exultant announcement. Now she hoped that it might

A Sleepless Night

have been done delicately, so that Alden need not feel himself a brute, nor Rosemary's pride be hurt.

Then, through the night, came a definite perception, as though Alden himself had given her assurance. Rosemary had done it herself, had she? Very well—that was as it should be. For a moment she dwelt upon the fact with satisfaction, then, a little frightened, began to speculate upon this mysterious tie between herself and Alden.

The thing was absurd, impossible. She curled her short upper lip scornfully in the darkness. "You know it is," she said, imperiously, in her thought, as though in answer to a mocking question from somewhere: "Is it?"

She turned restlessly. All at once her position became tiresome, unbearable. She wanted to go to sleep, indeed she must sleep, for she had a long hard day before her to-morrow, putting her things into her trunks. Perhaps, if she rose and walked around her room a little——

One small, pink foot was on the floor, and the other almost beside it, when a caution came to her from some external source: "Don't. You 'll take cold." She got back into bed, shivering a little. Yes, the polished floor was cold.

Then she became furious with Alden and

Sitting in the Dark

with herself. Why could n't the man go to sleep? It must be past midnight, now, and she would walk, if she wanted to. Defiantly and in a triumph of self-assertion, she went to the open window and peered out into the stillness, illumined by neither moon nor stars. The night had the suffocating quality of hangings of black velvet.

She lighted a candle, found her kimono and slippers, wrapped herself in a heavy blanket, and drew up a low rocker to the open window. Then she put out the light and settled herself to wait until she was sleepy.

The darkness that clung around her so closely seemed alive, almost thrilling, as it did, with fibres of communication perceptible only to a sixth sense. She marvelled at the strangeness of it, but was no longer afraid. Her fear had vanished at the bidding of someone else.

Why was it? she asked herself, for the hundredth time, and almost immediately the answer came: "Why not?"

Why not, indeed? If a wireless telegraph instrument, sending its call into space, may be answered with lightning-like swiftness by another a thousand miles away, why should not a thought, without the clumsy medium of speech, instantly respond to another thought from a mind in harmony with it?

A subtle analogy appeared between the

Two Views

earth and the body, the tower from which the wireless signalled and the thought which called to another. When the physical forces were at their lowest ebb, and the powers of the spirit had risen to keep the balance true, why was not communication possible always between soul and soul? And, if one lived always above the fog of sense, as far as the earth-bound may, what would be the need of speech or touch between those who belonged to one another?

She and Alden "belonged," there was no doubt of that. She had, for him, the woman's recognition of her mate, which is never to be mistaken or denied when once it has asserted itself. "Why," she thought, "will people marry without it?" The other mind responded instantly: "Because they don't know."

Marriage presented itself before her in two phases, the one sordid and unworthy, as it so often is, the other as it might be—the earthly seal upon a heavenly bond. But, if the heavenly relationship existed, was the other essential? Her heart answered "No."

Slowly she began to see her way through the maze of things. "Dust to dust, earth to earth, ashes to ashes." Then she laughed outright, for that was part of the burial service, and she had been thinking of something else. And yet—earth to earth meant only things that belonged together; why not soul to soul?

Warm tides of assurance and love flowed

through her heart, cleansing, strengthening, sweeping barriers aside in a mighty rush of joy. What barriers could earth interpose, when two belonged to each other in such heavenly ways as this? Step by step her soul mounted upward to the heights, keeping pace with another, in the room beyond.

Out of sound and sight and touch, with darkened spaces and closed doors between, they two faced the world together as surely as though they were hand in hand. Even Death could make no difference—need Life deny them more?

Then, with a blinding flash of insight, the revelation came to her—there was no denial, since they loved. Sense, indeed, was wholly put aside, but love has nothing to do with sense, being wholly of the soul. Shaken with wonder, she trembled as she sat in her chair, staring out into the starless night.

No denial! All that Love might give was theirs, not only for the moment but for all the years to come. Love—neither hunger nor thirst nor passion nor the need of sleep; neither a perception of the senses nor a physical demand, yet streaming divinely through any or all of these as only light may stream—the heavenly signal of a star to earth, through infinite darkness, illimitable space.

By tortuous paths and devious passages, she had come out upon the heights, into the

Her Understanding of Love

clear upper air of freedom and of love. Exquisitely, through the love of the one had come the love of the many; the complete mastery of self had been gained by the surrender of self; triumph had rewarded sacrifice.

Nothing was difficult now—nothing would ever be hard again. To go where she was wanted, to give what she could that was needed, steadily to set self aside, asking for nothing but the opportunity to help, and through this high human service renewing the spent forces of her soul at the divine fountains that do not fail—this, indeed, was Love!

Oh, to make the others understand as she understood now—and as Alden understood! In her thought they two were as one. Groping through the same darkness, he had emerged, with her, into the same light; she felt it through the living, throbbing night more certainly than if they stood face to face in the blinding glare of the sun.

The heart-breaking tragedy of Woman revealed itself wholly to her for the first time. Less materialistic and more finely-grained than Man, she aspires toward things that are often out of his reach. Failing in her aspiration, confused by the effort to distinguish the false from the true, she blindly clutches at the counterfeit and so loses the genuine forever.

Longing, from the day of her birth for Love, she spends herself prodigally in the endless

Her Estimate of Women

effort to find it, little guessing, sometimes, that it is not the most obvious thing Man has to offer. With colour and scent and silken sheen, she makes a lure of her body; with cunning artifice she makes temptation of her hands and face and weaves it with her hair. She flatters, pleads, cajoles; denies only that she may yield, sets free in order to summon back, and calls, so that when he has answered she may preserve a mystifying silence.

She affects a thousand arts that in her heart she despises, pretends to housewifery that she hates, forces herself to play tunes though she has no gift for music, and chatters glibly of independence when she has none at all.

In making herself "all things to all men," she loses her own individuality, and becomes no more than a harp which any passing hand may strike to quick response. To one man she is a sage, to another an incarnate temptation, to another a sensible, business-like person, to another a frothy bit of frivolity. To one man she is the guardian of his ideals, as Elaine in her high tower kept Launcelot's shield bright for him, to another she is what he very vaguely terms "a good fellow," with a discriminating taste in cigarettes and champagne.

Let Man ask what he will and Woman will give it, praying only that somewhere she will come upon Love. She adapts herself to him as water adapts itself to the shape of the vessel

Her Estimate of Women

in which it is placed. She dare not assert herself or be herself, lest, in some way, she should lose her tentative grasp upon the counterfeit which largely takes the place of love. If he prefers it, she will expatiate upon her fondness for vaudeville and musical comedy until she herself begins to believe that she likes it. With tears in her eyes and her throat raw, she will choke upon the assertion that she likes the smell of smoke; she will assume passion when his slightest touch makes her shudder and turn cold.

And, most pitiful of all, when blinded by her own senses, she will surrender the last citadel of her womanhood to him who comes a-wooing, undismayed by the weeping women around her whose sacred altars have been profaned and left bare. They may have told her that if it is love, the man will protect her even against himself, but why should she take account of the experience of others? Has not he himself just told her that she is different from all other women? Hugging this sophistry to her breast, and still searching for love, she believes him until the day of realisation dawns upon her—old and broken and bitter-hearted, with scarcely a friend left in the world, and not even the compensating coin thriftily demanded by her sister of the streets.

Under her countless masques and behind

her multitudinous phases, lurks the old hunger, the old appeal. Man, too, though more rarely, guessing that the imperishable beauty of the soul is above the fog of sense and not in it, searches hopefully at first, then despairingly, and finally offers the counterfeit to the living Lie who is waiting for it with eager, outstretched hands.

The Clouds Break

Stirred to the depths by the pity of it, Edith brushed away a tear or two. She was not at all sleepy, but drew the blanket closer around her, for the night grew chill as the earth swept farther and farther away from the sun. The clouds had begun to drift away, and faintly, through the shadow, glimmered one pale star. Gradually, others came out, then a white and ghostly moon, with a veil of cloud about it, grey, yet iridescent, like mother-of-pearl.

Blown far across the seas of space by a swiftly rising wind, the clouds vanished, and all the starry hosts of heaven marched forth, challenging the earth with javelins of light.

"Starbreak," murmured Edith, "up there and in my soul."

The blue rays of the love-star burned low upon the grey horizon, that star towards which the eyes of women yearn and which women's feet are fain to follow, though, like a will-o'-the-wisp, it leads them through

Fellowship with the World

strange and difficult places, and into the quicksands.

The body grows slowly, but the soul progresses by leaps and bounds. Through a single hurt or a single joy, the soul of a child may reach man's estate, never to go backward, but always on. And so, through a great love and her own complete comprehension of its meaning, Edith had grown in a night out of herself, into a beautiful fellowship with the whole world.

Strangely uplifted and forever at peace, she rose from her chair. The blanket slipped away from her, and her loosened hair flowed back over her shoulders, catching gleams of starlight as it fell. She stretched out her arms in yearning toward Alden, her husband, Madame—indeed, all the world, having come out of self into service; through the love of one to the love of all.

Then, through the living darkness, came the one clear call: "Mine?"

Unmistakably the answer surged back: "In all the ways of Heaven and for always, I am thine."

XIX

If Love Were All

When the Shadows Lengthen

THE last of the packing was done, and four trunks stood in the lower hall, waiting for the expressman. Alden had not seen Edith that day, though he had haunted the house since breakfast, waiting and hoping for even a single word.

She had been too busy to come down to luncheon, and had eaten only a little from the tray Madame sent to her room. She was to take the early train in the morning.

The afternoon shadows had begun to lengthen when she came down, almost as white as her fresh linen gown, but diffusing about her some radiance from within that seemed not wholly of earth. He met her at the foot of the stairs, and took her hand in his.

"Edith! I 've been longing for you all day!"

"And I for you," she returned, avoiding his eyes.

"Listen, dear. Give me the rest of it, won't you?"

For the Last Time

"The rest of what?"

"The little time you have left with us—this afternoon and to-night."

For a moment she hesitated, then looked him full in the face, her eyes mutely questioning his.

"I won't," he said. "I promise you that."

"Then I 'll come."

"Out on the river?"

"Yes."

"It 's for the last time, Edith," he said, sadly; "the very last time."

"I know," she returned. Her lips quivered a little, but her eyes did not falter. Clear and steadfast they looked far beyond him into the future where he had no part. The golden lights in them seemed signal fires now, summoning him mysteriously onward to some high service, not alien, even though apart from her.

They said no more until they were in the boat, swinging out upon the sunlit river. Then Edith glanced at him, half shyly.

"Was n't last night wonderful?"

"Was n't it!" he echoed. "I never understood before."

"Nor I."

She trailed a white hand in the water as they sped up stream. The light touched her hair lovingly, bringing gleams of gold and amber from the depths.

Alden's Silence

"Dear," he said, "did you think that, after last night, I could urge you to violate your solemn oath or even to break your word?"

"I hoped not, but I did n't know."

"I see it all clearly now. If more was meant for us to have, more would be right for us to take. Back in the beginning this was meant for you and me—just this, and nothing more."

"How could there be more? Is n't love enough?"

"Surely, but the separation hurts. Never even to see your face or touch your hand again!"

"I know," she said, softly. "I 'll want you, too."

A thousand things struggled for utterance, but, true to his word, he remained silent. His whole nature was merged into an imperious demand for her, the cry of the man's soul for the woman who belonged to him by divine right.

"If love were all," she breathed, as though in answer to it, "I 'd come."

"If love were all," he repeated. "I wonder why it is n't? What is there on earth aside from this? What more can heaven be than love—without the fear of parting?"

"No more," she replied. "We 've lost each other in this life, but there 's another life to come."

Whirling Atoms

"'Helen's lips are drifting dust,'" he quoted.

"Perhaps not. That which once was Helen may be alive to-day in a thousand different forms. A violet upon a mossy bank, a bough of apple blossoms mirrored in a pool, the blood upon some rust-stained sword, a woman waiting, somewhere, for a lover who does not come."

"And her soul?"

"Drawn back into the Universal soul, to be born anew, in part or all."

"What a pagan you are!"

"Yes," she responded, smiling a little, "I am pagan and heathen and Christian martyr and much else. I am everything that I can understand and nothing that I cannot. Don't you see?"

"Yes, I see, but what are we after all? Only two whirling atoms, blown on winds of Fate. What difference does it make whether we cling together, or are hopelessly sundered, as far apart as the poles?"

"The same difference that it makes to a human body whether its atoms behave or not. You don't want to upset the Universe, do you?"

He laughed, a trifle bitterly. "I don't flatter myself that I could."

"Not you alone, nor I, nor even both together, but we must n't set a bad example to

What Is Right?

other atoms. As long as there 's a preponderance of right in the world, things are clear, but, shift the balance, and then——"

"What is right?" he demanded, roughly. "Always to do the thing you don't want to do?"

"That depends," she returned, shrugging her shoulders. "It is to do what you think is right, and trust that it may be so."

Alden stopped rowing. He was interested in these vague abstractions. "And," he said, "if a woman thinks it is her duty to murder her husband, and does it, is she doing right?"

"Possibly. I 've seen lots of husbands who would make the world better by leaving it, even so—well, abruptly, as you indicate. And the lady you speak of, who, as it were, assists, may merely have drawn a generous part of Lucretia Borgia for her soul-substance, and this portion chanced to assert itself while her husband was in the house and out of temper."

"Don't be flippant, darling. This is our last day together. Let 's not play a waltz at an open grave."

The long light lay upon the tranquil waters, and, as a mirror might, the river gave it back a hundred-fold, sending stray gleams into the rushes at the bend in the stream, long arrows of impalpable silver into the far

A Rainbow

shadows upon the shore, and a transfiguring radiance to Edith's face.

Where the marsh swerved aside to wait until the river passed, the sunlight took a tall, purple-plumed iris, the reflection of the turquoise sky in a shallow pool, a bit of iridescence from a dragon-fly's wing, the shimmering green of blown grasses and a gleam of rising mist to make a fairy-like rainbow that, upon the instant, disappeared.

"Oh!" said Edith. "Did you see?"

"See what, dearest?"

"The rainbow—just for a moment, over the marsh?"

"No, I did n't. Do you expect me to hunt for rainbows while I may look into your face?"

The faint colour came to her cheeks, then receded. "Better go on," she suggested, "if we 're to get where we 're going before dark."

The oars murmured in the water, then rain dripped from the shining blades. The strong muscles of his body moved in perfect unison as the boat swept out into the sunset glow. Deeper and more exquisite with every passing moment, the light lay lovingly upon the stream, bearing fairy freight of colour and gold to the living waters that sang and crooned and dreamed from hills to sea.

"It does n't seem," she said, "as though it

A Perfect Spring Day

were the last time. With earth so beautiful, how can people be miserable?"

"Very easily," he responded. The expression of his face changed ever so little, and lines appeared around his mouth.

"I remember," Edith went on, "the day my mother died. It was a perfect day late in the Spring, when everything on earth seemed to exult in the joy of living. Outside, it was life incarnate, with violets and robins and apple blossoms and that ineffable sweetness that comes only then. Inside, she lay asleep, as pale and cold as marble. At first, I couldn't believe it. I went outside, then in again. One robin came to the tree outside her window and sang until my heart almost broke with the pain of it. And every time I 've heard a robin since, it all comes back to me."

"Yes," said Alden, quietly, "but all the life outside was made from death, and the death within had only gone on to life again. You cannot have one without the other, any more than you can have a light without a shadow somewhere."

"Nor a shadow," Edith continued, "without knowing that somewhere there must be light."

They stopped at the cleft between the hills, where they had been the other day, but this time no one waited, with breaking heart, behind the rustling screen of leaves. Against

At Sunset

the rock, with some simple woodcraft of stones and dry twigs, Alden made a fire, while Edith spread the white cloth that covered Madame's basket and set forth the dainty fare.

They ate in silence, not because there was nothing to say, but because there was so much that words seemed empty and vain. Afterward, when the flaming tapestry in the West had faded to a pale web of rose and purple, faintly starred with exquisite lamps of gleaming pearl, he came to her, and, without speaking, took her into his arms.

For a long time they stood there, heart to heart, in that rapturous communion wholly transcending sense. To him it was not because she was a woman; it was because she was Edith, the mate of his heart and soul. And, to her, it was a subtle completion of herself, the best of her answering eagerly to the best in him.

At last, with a sigh, he pushed her gently away from him, and looked down into her eyes with a great sadness.

"Never any more, beloved. Have you thought of that?"

"Yes, I know," she whispered. "Never any more."

"I 'll want you always."

"And I you."

"Sometimes my heart will almost break with longing for you, craving the dear touch

The Day's Duty

of you, though it might be only to lay my hand upon your face."

"Yes, I know."

"And at night, when I dream that we 're somewhere together, and I reach out my arms to hold you close, I 'll wake with a start, to find my arms empty and my heart full."

"The whole world lies between us, dear."

"And heaven also, I think."

"No, not heaven, for there we shall find each other again, with no barriers to keep us apart."

"I shall live only to make myself worthy of finding you, dearest. I have nothing else to do."

"Ah, but you have."

"What?"

"The day's duty, always; the thing that lies nearest your hand. You know, I 've begun to see that it is n't so much our business to be happy as it is to do the things we are meant to do. And I think, too, that happiness comes most surely to those who do not go out in search of it, but do their work patiently, and wait for it to come."

"That may be true for others, but not for us. What happiness is there in the world for me, apart from you?"

"Memory," she reminded him gently. "We 've had this much and nobody can take it away from us."

Memories

"But even this will hurt, heart's dearest, when we see each other no more."

"Not always." As she spoke, she sat down on the ground and leaned back against a tree. He dropped down beside her, slipped his arm around her, and drew her head to his shoulder, softly kissing her hair.

"I remember everything," she went on, "from the time you met me at the station. I can see you now as you came toward me, and that memory is all by itself, for nobody at the very first meeting looks the same as afterward. There is always some subtle change—I don't know why. Do I look the same to you now as I did then?"

"You 've always been the most beautiful thing in the world to me, since the first moment I saw you."

"No, not the first moment."

"When was it, then, darling?"

"The first night, when I came down to dinner, in that pale green satin gown. Don't you remember?"

"As if I could ever forget!"

"And you thought I looked like a tiger-lily."

"Did I?"

"Yes, but you did n't say it and I was glad, for so many other men had said it before."

"Perhaps it was because, past all your splendour, I saw you—the one perfect and

Kisses

peerless woman God made for me and sent to me too late."

"Not too late for the best of it, dear."

"What else do you remember?"

"Everything. I have n't forgotten a word nor a look nor a single kiss. The strange sweet fires in your eyes, the clasp of your arms around me, your lips on mine, the nights we 've lain awake with love surging from heart to heart and back again—it 's all strung for me into a rosary of memories that nothing can ever take away."

"That first kiss, beloved. Do you remember?"

"Yes. It was here." She stretched out her arm and with a rosy finger-tip indicated the bare, sweet hollow of her elbow, just below the sleeve.

Lover-like, he kissed it again. "Do you love me?"

"Yes, Boy—for always."

"How much?"

"Better than everything else in the world. Do you love me?"

"Yes, with all my heart and soul and strength and will. There is n't a fibre of me that does n't love you."

"For always?"

"Yes, for always."

And so they chanted the lover's litany until even the afterglow had died out of the sky.

Edith released herself from his clinging arms. "We must go," she sighed. "It's getting late."

He assisted her to her feet, and led her to the boat, moored in shallows that made a murmurous singing all around it and upon the shore. He took her hand to help her in, then paused.

"If love were all," he asked, "what would you do?"

"If love were all," she answered, "I'd put my arms around you, like this, never to be unclasped again. I'd go with you to-night, to the end of the world, and ask for nothing but that we might be together. I'd face the heat of the desert uncomplainingly, the cold of perpetual snows. I'd bear anything, suffer anything, do anything. I'd so merge my life with yours that one heart-beat would serve us both, and when we died, we'd go together—if love were all."

"God bless you, dear!" he murmured, with his lips against hers.

"And you. Come."

The boat swung out over the shallows into the middle of the stream, where the current took them slowly and steadily toward home. For the most part they drifted, though Alden took care to keep the boat well out from shore, and now and then, with the stroke of an oar dipped up a myriad of mirrored stars.

Seeking for a Message

Edith laughed. "Give me one, won't you, please?"

"You shall have them all."

"But I asked only for one."

"Then choose."

She leaned forward, in the scented shadow, serious now, with a quick and characteristic change of mood. "The love star," she breathed. "Keep it burning for me, will you, in spite of clouds and darkness—for always?"

"Yes, my queen—for always."

When they reached the house, Madame was nowhere in sight. Divining their wish to be alone on this last evening together, she had long since gone to her own room. The candles on the mantel had been lighted and the reading lamp burned low. Near it was the little red book that Edith had found at the top of the Hill of the Muses.

Sighing, she took it up. "How long ago it seems," she said, "and yet it was n't. Life began for me that night."

"And for me. I read to you, do you remember, just before I kissed you for the first time?"

"Yes. Read to me again just before you kiss me for the last time, then give me the book to keep."

"Which one? The same?"

"No," cried Edith. "Anything but that!"

"Then choose. Close your eyes, and choose."

"It 's like seeking for a message, or a sign,"

Severed Selves

she said, as she swiftly turned the pages. Then, with her eyes still closed, she offered him the book. "Here—read this. Is it a blank page?"

There was a pause, then Edith opened her eyes. "It is n't the first one you read to me, is it? Don't tell me that it is!"

"No," said Alden, "it is n't, but it 's a message. Listen."

She sat down, in her old place, but he stood at the table, bending toward the light. His boyish mouth trembled a little, his hands were unsteady, and there was a world of love and pain in his eyes. With his voice breaking upon the words, he read:

"Two separate divided silences,
Which, brought together, would find loving voice;
Two glances which together would rejoice
In love, now lost like stars beyond dark trees;
Two hands apart, whose touch alone gives ease;
Two bosoms which, heart-shrined with mutual flame,
Would, meeting in one clasp, be made the same;
Two souls, the shores wave-mocked of sundering seas:—

Such are we now. Ah! may our hope forecast
Indeed one hour again, when on this stream
Of darkened love once more the light shall gleam?—
An hour how slow to come, how quickly past,—
Which blooms and fades, and only leaves at last,
Faint as shed flowers, the attenuated dream."

For a moment the silence was tense. Then the hall clock struck the hour of midnight.

It beat upon their senses like a funeral knell. Then Edith, white-faced, and struggling valiantly for self-control, reached out her hand for the book. Good-bye

"Good-night, Boy," she said, "for the last time."

"Good-night," he answered, gathering her into his arms.

"And good-bye, Boy, forever!"

"Forever," he echoed, "good-bye!"

He kissed her again, not with passion, but with the love that has risen above it. Then she released herself, and, holding the little red book against her heart, ran quickly upstairs.

He waited until the echo of her footsteps had died away, and her door had closed softly. Then he put out the lights, and sat there for a long time in the darkness, thinking, before he went to his room.

XX

"The Lady Traveller"

Grandmother's Loss

"THEY ain't on the bureau and they ain't on the washstand, and I disremember takin' 'em out last night when I went to bed, so I must have swallered 'em." Grandmother's speech was somewhat blurred but her meaning was distinct.

"Well," returned Matilda, with aggravating calmness, "if you have swallowed 'em, you have, so what of it?"

"Matilda Starr! I should think you 'd have some human feelin's about you somewheres. Here your mother 's gone and swallered her false teeth and you set there, not tryin' to do anything for her."

"What can I do? I can't stand on a chair and swing you by your feet, same as Mis' Bates did when her little Henry choked on a marble, can I? Besides, you could n't have swallowed 'em. You 'll find 'em somewheres."

"Maybe I could n't have swallered 'em, but I have," Grandmother mumbled. "What 's more, I feel 'em workin' now inside me.

What's the Matter?

They 're chewing on the linin' of my stomach, and it hurts."

"I did n't know there was any linin' in your stomach."

"There is. It said so in the paper."

"Did it say anything about hooks and eyes and whalebones? What kind of a linin' is it—cambric, or drillin'?"

"I don't see how you can set there, Matilda, and make fun of your poor old mother, when she 's bein' eaten alive by her own teeth. I would n't treat a dog like that, much less my own flesh and blood."

"I 've never heard of dogs bein' et by their own teeth," commented Matilda, missing the point.

Ostentatiously lame, Grandmother limped to the decrepit sofa and lay down with a groan. Rosemary came in from the kitchen with the oatmeal, and was about to go back for the coffee when another groan arrested her attention.

"What 's the matter?" she asked.

"I 'm dyin', Rosemary," Grandmother mumbled, hoarsely. "I 've swallered my teeth, and I am dyin' in agony."

"Nonsense! You could n't have swallowed your teeth!"

"That 's what I told her," said Miss Matilda, triumphantly.

"But I have," Grandmother retorted,

Rosemary to the Rescue

feebly. "I can feel 'em—here." She placed her hand upon her ill-defined waist line, and groaned again.

Rosemary ran upstairs, inspired to unusual speed by the heartrending sounds that came from below. When she returned, Grandmother seemed to be in a final spasm, and even Matilda was frightened, though she would not have admitted it.

"Here," said Rosemary. "Now come to breakfast."

Grandmother rolled her eyes helplessly toward Rosemary, then suddenly sat up. "Where 'd you get 'em?" she demanded, in a different tone.

"They were on the floor under the washstand. Please come before everything gets cold."

"I told you you had n't swallowed 'em," remarked Matilda, caustically.

"Maybe I did n't, but I might have," rejoined Grandmother. "Anyhow, I 've seen how you 'd all act in case I had swallered 'em, and I know who to leave my money to when I die." She beamed kindly upon Rosemary, in whom the mention of money had produced mingled emotions of anger and resentment.

"If you had swallowed 'em, Rosemary could n't have got 'em," Matilda objected.

"She 'd have tried," said the old lady,

A Bit of Gossip

sharply, "and that 's more than can be said of some folks. Not mentionin' any names."

Breakfast bade fair to be a lively sparring match when Rosemary interposed, pacifically: "Never mind what might have been. Let 's be glad she did n't swallow them." As the others accepted this compromise, the remainder of the meal proceeded in comparative peace.

"I heard from the milkman this morning," said Matilda, "that Marshs' company has gone."

"Gone!" repeated Grandmother. "What for? I thought she had come to stay a spell."

"Gone!" echoed Rosemary, in astonishment.

"Did she go sudden?" queried Grandmother.

"Well, in a way it was sudden, and in a way 't was n't. She was more 'n a whole day puttin' her clothes into her trunks—the respectable trunk, and the big trunk, and the dog-house, and the one what had bulges on all sides but one."

"What train did she go on?"

"The eight o'clock accommodation, yesterday morning. Young Marsh went down to see her off, and the station agent told the milkman that he stood lookin' after the train until you could n't even see the smoke from the engine. The agent was restin' after havin' helped hist the trunks on the train, and young Marsh up and handed him out a dollar, without even sayin' what it was for. He reckoned it

A Tip

was pay for stoppin' the train and helpin' to put on the trunks, but the railroad pays him for doin' that, so the milkman thinks it was kind of a thank-offerin', on account of her havin' stayed so long that they was glad to get rid of her."

"'T was n't no thank-offerin'," replied Grandmother, shaking her head sagely. "That 's what they call a tip."

"The agent was some upset by it," Matilda agreed. "He 's been keepin' station here for more 'n ten years now and nobody ever did the likes of that before."

"I did n't say it was an upsetment—I said it was a tip."

"What 's the difference?"

"A tip is money that you give somebody who thinks he 's done something for you, whether you think he has or not."

"I don't understand," Matilda muttered.

"I did n't either, at first," Grandmother admitted, "but I was readin' a piece in the paper about women travellin' alone and it said that 'in order to insure comfort, a tip should be given for every slight service.' Them 's the very words."

"It means bowin', then," returned Matilda. "Bowin' and sayin', 'Thank you.'"

"It 's no such thing. Wait till I get the paper."

After a prolonged search through the hoarded

A Lady's Baggage

treasures of the past three or four months, Grandmother came back to her chair by the window, adjusted her spectacles, and began to read "The Lady Traveller by Land."

"'When it becomes necessary, for the sake of either business or pleasure, for a lady to start out upon a trip alone, no matter how short, she should make all her preparations well in advance, so that she need not be hurried just before starting, and may embark upon her journey with that peaceful and contented mind which is so essential to the true enjoyment of travelling.

"'She will, of course, travel with the smallest amount of baggage compatible with comfort, but a few small articles that should not be overlooked will more than repay the slight trouble caused by their transportation. Among these may be mentioned the medicine chest, in which are a few standard household remedies for illness or accident, a bottle of smelling-salts, another of cologne, and a roll of old linen for bandages. While accident is not at all likely, it is just as well to be prepared for all emergencies.

"'The lady traveller will naturally carry her own soap and towels, and also a silk or cotton bag for her hat. She——'"

"A what for her hat?" asked Matilda, with unmistakable interest.

"'A silk or cotton bag for her hat,'"

The Hat-Bag

Grandmother repeated. "'To keep the dust out.'"

"What 's the good of wearin' a hat if she 's got to set with a bag over it?"

"It does n't say she 's to wear the bag."

"Well, she 's wearin' the hat, ain't she? How 's she to put the bag over the hat while she 's wearin' the hat without wearin' the bag too? That 's what I 'd like to know."

"Maybe it 's to put her hat into when she takes it off for the night," Grandmother suggested, hopefully, though she was not at all sure. "A person ain't likely to get much sleep in a hat."

"No, nor in a bag neither."

"'She should also carry her luncheon, as the meals supplied to travellers are either poor or expensive, or both. With a small spirit lamp she can very easily make coffee or tea for herself, or heat a cupful of milk should she be restless in the night. Care should be taken, however, not to set fire to the curtains surrounding the berth in this latter emergency.'

"'The curtains surrounding the berth,'" Grandmother repeated, in a wavering voice. "It's printed wrong. They've got it b-e-r-t-h."

"Seems to me," murmured Matilda, "that a woman who——"

"Matilda!" interrupted Grandmother, imperiously. For a moment the silence was awkward. "Unmarried women ain't got any

call to be thinkin' about such things, let alone speakin' of 'em. This piece is written to cover all possible emergencies of the lady traveller, but it ain't for such as you to be askin' questions about what don't concern you."

"Go ahead," said Matilda, submissively.

"Where was I? Oh, yes. 'The ladies' dressing-room will always be found at one of the two ends of the car. Care should be taken early in the journey to ascertain which end. If there are many ladies in the car, one should rise early, to take advantage of the unoccupied room for a cooling and refreshing sponge bath. It will be necessary to carry a sponge for this, and a small bag of rubber or oiled silk should be made for it to prevent moistening the contents of the suit-case after using.'"

"Supposin' they all subscribed for this paper," Matilda objected, "and all should rise early for the cooling and refreshing sponge bath?"

"'Tain't likely," Grandmother answered. "'After the bath one should take plenty of time to dress, as nothing is less conducive to comfort in travelling than the feeling that one has been too hastily attired. By this time, the porter will have the berth in order, if he has been tipped the night before.'"

Matilda murmured inarticulately, but was too wise to speak.

The Porter

"'The usual tip,'" Grandmother continued, hastily, with her cheeks burning, "'is twenty-five cents for each person every twenty-four hours. In order to insure comfort, a tip should be given for every slight service, but nothing smaller than five cents should ever be given at any one time.

"'It has been said that a porter is a dark gentleman who has been employed to keep air out of the car, but the lady traveller will find it easy to induce him to open a ventilator or two if he has been properly tipped. Fresh air is very essential for the true enjoyment of travelling.

"'He can throw many little comforts in one's way—a pillow during the daytime or an extra blanket at night, or——'"

"I don't know," Matilda interrupted, "as I 'd care to have comforts or pillows or blankets thrown at me, night or day, especially by a man, no matter what colour he is."

"'Mindful always of the possibility of accident,'" Grandmother resumed, "'it is well to keep one's self as presentable as possible, especially during the night, when according to statistics the majority of wrecks occur. Consequently the experienced lady traveller will not undress entirely, but merely removing a few of her outer garments, and keeping her shoes within easy reach, she will don a comfortable dressing-gown, and compose herself

for sleep. Some people prefer to have the berth made up feet first, but it is always better to have the head toward the engine, as experience has proved that the slight motion of the train assists the circulation, which should run toward the feet if sleep is to be enjoyed during the night.

"'If, owing to circumstances, it is impossible to carry a luncheon and one must either leave the train for one's meals or go into the dining-car, there are a few very simple rules to remember. In case the meal is to be taken at a wayside station, and, as often happens, there is more than one eating-house which offers refreshment, the lady traveller should wait quietly by her own car until she sees into which place the train officials go. Remember that they have been over the road before and know where the most comfortable and reasonable meal is to be had.

"'Upon the other hand, if one goes into the dining-car, the same rules apply as at any well-regulated hotel. From the list of dishes which will be offered her upon a printed card, the lady traveller may select such as seem attractive, and, in case of doubt, she may with perfect propriety ask the waiter to make a selection for her, as he has been placed there by the company for that purpose.

"'Having eaten to her satisfaction, she will carefully compare the check which is brought

Ten Per Cent

her with the list of prices given upon the printed card, add them up mentally without seeming to do so, and if all is right, pay the bill, giving to the waiter ten per cent of the total amount for a tip. That is, if the check calls for one dollar, the waiter will receive a dollar and ten cents.'"

"What for?" queried Matilda.

"That 's his tip," explained the old lady. "That 's what I 've been tellin' you all along."

"Does it cost ten dollars to go to the city?"

"Not as I know of. The fare used to be four dollars and somethin'. Why?"

"Then why did young Marsh give the station agent a dollar? That 's what I want to know."

"You can't find out from me," Grandmother answered, with all evidence of having told the literal truth. "Shall I go on with this piece I 'm tryin' to read, or don't you want your mind improved none?"

"I 'm willing to have my mind improved, but I 'd like the privilege of askin' a question occasionally while it 's being done."

"Last week's paper said there was no way of improvin' the mind that was to be compared with readin'. Shall I go on?"

"Yes—go on."

"'If the check calls for a dollar and a half, the waiter will receive an extra fifteen cents for his tip, and so on. In case of any disagreement, always refer to the train officials, who

Avoid Making Acquaintances

are usually courteous and well-mannered. Should they not be so, however, a threat to write to the President of the railroad will usually be found all sufficient to produce a change of demeanour.

"'The lady traveller should bear in mind the fact that it is impossible to confine the pleasures and privileges of travel to entirely reputable persons, and should hence keep upon the safe side by making no chance acquaintances, whatever the provocation may be.

"'By wearing dark clothes, preferably her old ones, an unassuming hat, and no jewelry, the lady traveller may render herself inconspicuous and not likely to attract masculine attention. In case of accident it is allowable to accept assistance from anyone, though the train officials are at all times to be preferred. If one desires to know what time it is, how late the train is, how long the train will stop at the next meal station, or when one is due at one's destination, the train officials are the ones to ask.

"'Upon a long and tedious journey, however, or in case of many prolonged delays, it is quite permissible to exchange a few words upon the weather or some other topic of mutual interest with a fellow-passenger of the same sex, whether she be travelling alone, or accompanied by her husband.

"'Pleasant acquaintances are sometimes

At the End of the Journey

formed in this way, and it may be entirely safe and proper, under certain circumstances, to accept small courtesies from a gentleman who is travelling with his wife, such as the brief loan of a newspaper or magazine, or information regarding the scenery through which the train is passing when none of the train officials are at hand.

"'It is best, however, to be very careful, for it is much easier not to begin friendly relations with one's fellow passengers than it is to discontinue such relations after they have been once begun.

"'It is seldom necessary, or even advisable, to give one's name to anyone except the officials of the train, but there can be no objection to showing a fellow-passenger of the same sex one's name upon one's ticket if polite relations have been established. This is better than speaking the name aloud, which might cause embarrassment if it were overheard, and carries with it no such social obligation as the exchange of cards would do.

"'Arriving at her destination, the lady traveller should proceed at once to her hotel or lodging-house, if no friend is to meet her, regardless of the plans of her fellow passengers. If one should chance to meet any of them afterward, a courteous inclination of the head, accompanied by a bright smile, is sufficient recognition, or, if for any reason one prefers

Appeal to the Conductor

not to recognise those with whom one has travelled, all that is necessary is to appear not to see them.

"'In case a gentleman should attempt to converse with the lady traveller while the train is in motion or at rest, this same conduct meets the exigencies of the situation admirably: simply do not appear to see him. If, however, he continues to converse, turn to him, and say in a low, well-controlled voice: "Sir, if you persist further in forcing your unwelcome attentions upon me, I shall summon the conductor at once."

"'In most cases, the objectionable party will at once leave and the interference of the conductor will not be required.

"'The next article in this series will deal with "The Lady Traveller by Water," where conditions are entirely different and require a different line of conduct.'"

"There," said Grandmother, clearing her throat and folding up the paper. "I hope you understand now what a tip is."

"It seems to be one tenth of all you've got," observed Matilda, staring out of the window, "like those religious sects that believes in givin' a tenth of everything to the church."

"Travellin' must be terribly exciting," remarked Grandmother, pensively.

"So 't is," Matilda agreed after a pause. "I reckon it 's better to stay at home."

XXI

The Weaving of the Tapestry

A Bunch of Grapes

ALDEN threw himself into his work with feverish energy, instinctively relieving his mind by wearying his body. All day he toiled in the vineyard, returning at night white-faced and exhausted, but content.

One morning when Madame came down to breakfast, she found at her plate a single bunch of grapes, wet with dew and still cool with the chill of the night. She took it up with an exclamation of pleasure, for never, within her memory, had such grapes as these come even from the Marsh vineyards.

She held the heavy cluster to the sunlight, noting the perfect shape of the fruit, the purple goblets filled with sweetness, and the fairy-like bloom, more delicate even than the dust on the butterfly's wing. Pride and thankfulness filled her heart, for, to her, it was not only their one source of income but a trust imposed upon them by those who had laid out the vineyard, and, more than all else, the standard by which her son was to succeed or fail.

Night after Night

The tribal sense was strong in Madame, last though she was of a long and noble line. Uninterruptedly the blood of the Marshs had coursed through generation after generation, carrying with it the high dower of courage, of strength to do the allotted task hopefully and well. And now—Madame's face saddened, remembering Edith.

Since her one attempt to cross the silence that lay like a two-edged sword between them, Madame had said nothing to Alden. Nor had he even mentioned Edith's name since she went away, though his face, to the loving eyes of his mother, bore its own message.

Night after night, when they sat in the living-room after dinner, no word would be spoken by either until bedtime, when Madame would say "Good-night," and, in pity, slip away, leaving him to follow when he chose. Sometimes he would answer, but, more frequently, he did not even hear his mother leave the room. Yearning over him as only a mother may, Madame would lie awake with her door ajar, listening for his step upon the stairs.

While the night waxed and waned, Alden sat alone, his eyes fixed unalterably upon Edith's empty chair, in which, by common consent, neither of them sat. The soft outlines of her figure seemed yet to lie upon the faded tapestry; the high, carved back seemed still

Balm for Alden

to bear the remembered splendour of her beautiful head.

After Madame had gone, Alden would sometimes light the candle that stood upon the piano, mute now save for the fingers of Memory. Moving the bench out a little and turning it slightly toward the end of the room, he would go back to his own far corner, where he used to sit while Edith played.

Conjuring her gracious image out of the dreamy shadows, he found balm for his sore heart in the white gown that fell softly around her, the small white foot that now and then pressed the pedal, the long, graceful line that swept from her shoulder to her finger-tips, the faint hollow where her gown, with the softness of a caress, melted into the ivory whiteness of her neck, the thick, creamy skin, in some way suggesting white rose-leaves, the scarlet, wistful mouth, the deep brown eyes reflecting golden lights, and the crown of wonderful hair that shimmered and shone and gleamed like burnished gold.

The subtle sweetness of her filled the room. She had left behind her not only a memory but the enduring impress of personality. The house was full of Ediths. There was one at the table, another at the piano, one leaning against the mantel with hands clasped behind her, another in a high-backed rocker, leaning back against a dull green cushion, and one upon

Release from Pain

the stairway, ascending with light steps that died away with the closing of a door, or descending with a quick rustle of silken skirts that presently merged into perfume, then into her.

Every gown she had worn, every word she had said, every laugh that had wakened slumbering echoes with its low, vibrant contralto, came remorselessly back. Full tides of longing beat pitilessly upon his senses, never, it seemed, to ebb again. And yet, at times, when his whole soul so cried out for her that he stretched his arms, in yearning, toward the myriad phantom Ediths that peopled the room, mystical assurance would come from somewhere that she, too, was keeping the night watch.

Through the tense and throbbing darkness, love sped from one to the other as though upon ghostly wings. Neither sight nor sound nor touch betrayed its coming, yet the call and the answer were always divinely sure. As though they two stood dumbly on either side of some mysterious portal, denied all things save longing, heart-beat answered unto heart-beat in the stillness of the night.

The experience invariably brought comfort and a certain release from pain. Denial seemed to be but another phase of fulfilment, since it opened the way for this exquisite belonging of one to the other. Beyond and above all

Toiling in the Vineyard

lure of woman, wholly aside from the ecstasy of sight and touch, she was his as inseparably as perfume belongs to the rose that breathes it forth.

While he worked in the vineyard it was consciously for her. For her sake he aspired to make the best of himself; to make this hillside yield its purple banners from the secret storehouses within. So he had struggled with soil and season, with suns that scorched and winds that chilled, with parching days that opened the earth in great crevices, and with torrents that made the paths between the vines impassable for days.

From the wide windows that overlooked the valley, Madame watched the vineyard with an anxious heart. She, too, had toiled as far as a woman might, in the years that elapsed between the death of her husband and the maturity of her son. Sometimes all the powers and purposes of Nature had apparently been arrayed against her, and, again, as at the touch of a magic wand, the earth had yielded up its fruit.

Yet she had never lost her courage. Knowing that the logical strength of position lies nearly always with the pursuer, she would never own herself beaten, though there was a time of terror when the crop failed for three successive years.

Now the tapestry lay before her, well on

The Coming of Spring

its way to completion. She had watched the great web spread upon the hillside, year by year, from snow to snow again. Surrounding it on three sides, like the frame upon which it was stretched, were the stalwart pines that protected it from the icy winds. Below, like a silver ribbon, the river irregularly bounded it, a shining line of demarcation between the valley and the opposite hills.

When the snows were deep, there were only gentle undulations to mark the covered vines. Even the pines bent low with it, as though hoary with their weight of years. When the snows melted, tiny crystal rivulets ran down the tapestry, into the silver ribbon that was stretched across the foot, and upon a neutral background of earth the black, tangled threads showed dimly.

In a night, almost, there would come a change. Where the threads had lain hopelessly matted, appeared some semblance of order, as though the Weaver had come. Then, as they became separate groups, a faint glow of green dawned above them, not so much colour as the promise of colour, not so much design as the planning of it.

Through and through the web, like the Weaver's shuttle, figures moved from one tangle of threads to another, setting all straight as they went. Swiftly then the colour came, green upon the black, with the neutral earth

The New Growth

filling the background, gradually to be covered save for the long regular lines that stretched from East to West, from North to South.

All the beauty of Spring and Summer went to the making of the tapestry: the first robin's cheery call, the shimmer of blue wings speeding across it, the golden glow from an oriole's breast, and the silver rain of melody dripping from the throat of a meadow-lark as he swept through the infinite spaces above.

Up into the threads came the thousand stored sweetnesses of the earth, aspiring surely upward through devious, winding ways. The softness of leaves that had gone back to dust, the wine from fallen grapes that had dripped through the sand into the dark storehouse beneath, were only to be taken up again, for sap or fibre or bloom.

Blown perfumes came from distant orchards, mysteriously to become a part of the tapestry. Purple dawns and prismatic sunsets, crystalline noons and starry midnights slowly but surely were woven in. The new leaves shone afar, surrounding the vineyard with a faint, iridescent sheen through which tiny wings moved ceaselessly with a far-off, sleepy sound.

Weary winds came to the vineyard, and, for the moment, lay at peace upon the web, drinking the exquisite fragrance of leaf and blossom. Then, rising slowly, as though still intoxicated with that more than mortal sweet-

The Ripening of the Grapes

ness, they bore it afar to the four corners of the earth. Some of it sank into the valley, and the river turned in its sleep to dimple with smiles, ripple with silvery laughter, and drop to sleep again. The scent of it rose to the hills, like heavenly incense from earthly altars, and the Little People in feathers and fur breathed deeply of it and were glad.

Wild bees hummed through the web, and left it, heavy laden with the sweet essence distilled from the dust by the subtle chemistry of sun and rain. And the Weaver only smiled at the golden-winged army of plunderers, for secretly they ministered unto the vineyard in ways of love.

Then the Weaver paused to rest, for the pattern was made and there was only the colour to be put in. The fragrance died, the blossoms fell, and the miracle of the tapestry began. Where there had been scent, came substance; where there had been promise, came fulfilment.

With a single mighty impulse the vines took deep hold of the treasure in the storehouse beneath, spending it prodigally for sap to be poured into these waiting goblets of emerald and pearl. All the hoarded strength of leaf and tendril was caught up by the current, and swept blindly onward to its fruitful destiny.

And so the first faint hints of purple came into the tapestry, to spread and deepen and

The Gathering of the Fruit

divide and spread again until, in certain lights, the vineyard lay transfigured in an amethystine glow.

Shaded by the leaves that had begun to wither, held by tendrils that were strained until they could hold no more, the purple chalices swung lazily in the golden light, slowly filling with the garnered sweetness that every moment brought. Night and day the alchemy went on—dust and sun and dreaming, dust and moon and dreaming, while the Weaver waited, dreaming too, until the web should be complete.

When the signal was given for the tapestry to be taken from the loom, the Weaver crept away, for he could do no more. Figures thronged upon the hillside, gaily coloured garments appeared here and there in the web, and a medley of soft foreign voices rose where for long there had been no sound.

From side to side of the web the workers moved, always bearing armfuls of purple, to the frame of pines and beyond it. And so the tapestry faded, day by day, and the vines died, and great bare spaces were left upon the background where the neutral earth showed through.

Steadily among them moved one stately figure—a tall young man with big brown eyes and a boyish mouth. From early morning until dusk his voice could be heard, issuing

After the Day's Work

directions, hurrying the laggards, and bidding others to go back and work more slowly.

Creaking through the valley, on the tawny road that lay below the tapestry, went, each night, waggons heavily laden with baskets packed into crates. Far beyond the frame of pines was a small group of houses, whither the workers went with their armfuls of purple, returning presently to despoil the hillside further.

At dusk, when the day's work was over, the smoke of camp-fires rose against the after-glow, and brooded over the vineyard in a faint haze like its lost bloom. The scent of grapes mingled with the pungent odour of burning pine, and broken chalices upon the ground were trod into purple stains, as of blood. Tales of love and war went from camp-fire to camp-fire, and fabulous stories were told of the yield of other vineyards in the same valley.

Finally the last grapes were gathered, the last baskets packed and crated, and along the road the laden waggons creaked for the last time. Then the young man gave a great feast for the workers, lasting from noon until midnight, with pitchers of cider, great loaves of freshly baked bread and cake, roasted fowls, hot baked potatoes, and pink hams, crusted with crumbs and cloves and sugar, that fell into flakes at the touch of the knife.

The Veil of Beauty

The same waggons that had carried the grapes now took the workers to the train. The young man who had paid them their wages accompanied them, and, at the station, there was a great medley of farewells spoken in five or six different tongues. When the last shriek of the engine had died away and the roar of the train was lost in the distance, the young man drew a long breath of relief and went home.

A deadly silence reigned upon the hillside where the torn web lay, its bloom and beauty all gone. Ragged bits of green, mingled with dull brown tracery of vine and tendril, lay back upon the background of earth, but of purple there was no trace. In the hush of the night, the Weaver came back, to muse sadly over what had been and, perhaps, to dream of what yet might be.

There was chance of no more weaving, for the threads were broken and the time was short, but the rack and ruin were pitiful to see. So, from hidden places no man may guess, the Weaver summoned the Secret Spinners, bidding them lay a veil upon the vineyard.

Swiftly there came forth a miracle of beauty. Fairy lace and impalpable mysteries of chiffon were laid upon the hillside, spreading from vine to vine. Sometimes a single slender thread, impearled with dewdrops, bridged the distance from one tendril to another, again a bit of cobweb was spread over a dead leaf,

Content at Last

to catch a hint of iridescence from the sun or moon; and now and then a shimmering length of ghostly fabric was set in place at dusk, to hold the starry lights that came to shine upon the broken tapestry with the peace of benediction.

Along the well-trodden ways Alden went, tired, but content, having come at last to the knowledge of himself. Already he was planning to enlarge the vineyard next year, and to try another variety of grapes upon the new ground. He considered one plan to hurry the packing, another to hasten the crop, and studied the problem of housing the workers from their standpoint, not from his.

For the first time he was thinking of his work as something other than a necessary evil. It had become, in a sense, a means of grace, for he had discovered that the spirit in which one earns his daily bread means as much to his soul as the bread itself may mean to his body.

The light from the low reading-lamp lay softly upon Madame's silvered hair, as she bent over her bit of fancy work, silent, as usual, since the spell of Edith's presence had come into the house. Alden was not even pretending to read the paper—he sat staring into the shadows before him at Edith's empty chair, but, as he looked, he smiled.

The Goal Reached

With a little lump in her throat Madame bent over her work again, having looked up to thread her needle, and having seen his face. For a moment she waited, hoping for a confidence, but there was none.

Alden took a letter from his pocket and tossed it into her lap. It announced the sale of the crop at a larger price than ever before, and requested the first chance upon the yield of the following year.

Madame folded it up and gave it back to him, then their eyes met.

Young and strong and hopeful, radiating the consciousness of good work well done, her son smiled back at her. Her face illumined with joy.

"Master of the vineyard at last, my son?" she said.

He rose from his chair, bent over, and kissed her fondly. "Yes, Mother, thanks to you—and Edith." Then he added, after a pause: "Master of myself, too."

XXII

Each to His Own Work

Alden Writes to Edith

"Heart's Dearest:

It was two months ago to-day that you went away, and to me it has been eternity. Every day and every hour I think of you, sometimes with such intense longing that it seems as though the air before me must take shape and yield you to my arms.

"I have been working hard, and—no, I will not say 'trying to forget,' since memory, upon the dull background of my commonplace existence has set one great blazing star. I would not, if I could choose, go back to one hour that did not hold you, but rather would I pray for Time to stand still for us at any one of his jewelled moments upon the dial, when you and I were heart to heart.

"Mysteriously you have made everything right for me, denied all things though we are. After ten years of struggle with the vineyard, with several conspicuous failures and now and then a half-hearted success, I have at last rejoiced Mother's heart—and my own as well—

Drudgery

with the largest crop within my memory or hers. The fruit, too, has been finer than ever before.

"The school, also, which I have hated ever since I had it, begins to appear before me in a new light. It is not only those dull and stupid children who are to learn lessons in that one-roomed schoolhouse—it is I. While they struggle with the alphabet and multiplication-table and the spelling of words in four syllables, their teacher has before him invaluable opportunities to acquire patience, self-control, and a sense of justice, if not to inspire affection.

"Before, I went my way in sullen discontent. Because I could not do the things I wanted to do, I disdained the humble tasks assigned me, forgetting that in the great scheme of things each one of us has his work. Some of us must scrub floors, others carry bricks or mortar, and others must grow grapes and teach school.

"I had thought, in my blindness, that the great things were the easiest to do, but now I see that drudgery is an inseparable part of everything worth while, and the more worth while it is, the more drudgery is involved.

"In years gone by I have given time to the vineyard, but nothing at all of myself. I held myself aloof and apart while Duty, like a stern taskmaster, urged me to the things I hated, merely to please Mother, who had done

so much for me that she had the right to demand this.

"This year I have put my heart into my work. When failure seemed imminent, I have laboured with fresh courage. I have remembered, too, that the tools with which I worked were human beings like myself, and not so many mere machines.

"My love for you has been the magic key that has unlocked the doors dividing me from my fellow-men. No longer isolated, no longer apart, I am one of a brotherhood that claims fellowship with all humanity. One blood flows uninterruptedly through us all, one heart beats in us all, and, truly seen, we are not separate individuals, but only component parts of the Greater Self.

"Once I was absorbed in myself. Now I yearn unspeakably toward all with whom I come in contact. I see a thousand ways in which I may be kind. It is not for me to preach the gospel of love and understanding, but to live it, and, in living it, either to lead or to follow, as may be right and best.

"Hitherto I have kept away from the workers in the vineyard as much as I possibly could. Some of them have come for five years in succession, and I neither remembered their faces nor knew their names. Now, not because I felt that it was my duty, but because I really wanted to, I have tried to come a

The Humble Toilers

little closer, to see into their lives as best I might.

"I have seen before me such dramas of suffering and love as have made me ashamed, more than once, of my own worthless life and my own vain repinings. These humble toilers in my vineyard had come nearer the truth of things than I had, and were happier. Night after night I have been glad of the shelter of the darkness and have moved back out of the circle of light made by the camp-fire, that none of them might see my face.

"One woman, too weak and ill to work, would lie down among the vines to rest, while her husband filled her basket from his own. They needed money for a crippled child who could be made right by an expensive operation. One night I saw a lantern moving back and forth among the vines, and when I went out to investigate, the man was hard at work, filling basket after basket, because he knew that it was not right to draw two people's pay without doing two people's work.

"He had done this every night, and sometimes, too, the woman had spent her limited strength labouring beside him. Both were nearly heartbroken, having figured up that, at the rate the work was being done, they would still be twenty dollars short of the desired sum. So I gave them this, and they are to return it when they can. If it is not possible to return

A Feast for the Workers

it earlier, they are to come next year and work it out. I have no fear that they will not come, but, even should they fail me, I would rather lose the money and have my trust betrayed, than to miss a chance of helping where I might.

"One man had been saving for years that he might send to Italy for his wife and children. His earnings would give him a little more than the amount he needed, and he was counting the days until he could put his plan into execution. He could neither read nor write, so, one night, by the camp-fire, I wrote his letter for him, in my best schoolmaster's hand, for the first time finding my scanty knowledge of Italian of some real use.

"We have always given them a feast when the work was over, and sent some trifling presents to the wives and children who had remained behind. This was for our own sake, however, and not in any sense for theirs. It has been hard to get people to come, and we wanted to offer inducements.

"This time I sat at the head of the table myself. We had songs and stories and much good cheer. Afterward, when I said good-night, they all came to shake hands with me and say 'Thank you.' It was the first time.

"One man who lives in a crowded district in the city, has a wife who has tuberculosis. The remainder of the family consists of a daughter of fourteen and a boy of nine. He

Passing On

is to come back and bring them with him. They are to have the best of the workers' houses, on the pine hill above the vineyard. On a cot, in the clean cold air, the mother will get well again if it is possible for her to get well. I have work enough around the place for the man, the boy can go to school, and the Lady Mother will train the daughter in the ways of housewifery. In the evenings I shall teach her to read and write.

"We have swept our attic clean of things we had stored away. We have given not only what we do not need, but what we can do without. This winter, when the North wind howls down the chimney, while I am sheltered and warm, it will afford me satisfaction to know that my useless garments are, at last, doing good service somewhere.

"Mother, too, has caught the spirit of it. I cannot tell you of the countless things she has sent away—bedding, clothes, shoes, furniture, food—everything. I do not know why the workers' shacks around the vineyard should remain idle practically all the time—there must be others in damp cellars in that crowded city who have become diseased, and who could be healed by the pure cold air up among my ancestral pines. I will see what can be done.

"These people who come to my vineyard are, as it were, the connecting link between me and the outer world. I had thought there

A Strange Dream

was nothing for me to do here, and behold, there is so much to be done that I scarcely know where to begin. And this work has been at my very door, as it were, for ten years, and I have not seen it. Next year, I think I shall have a night school for two hours each evening after work. Many of them are pathetically eager to learn and have no opportunity to do so.

"The night the workers all went back to the city, I had a strange dream which now seems significant. I thought I was in a great factory, somewhere, that was given over to the weaving of cloth. It was well equipped, there were innumerable orders waiting to be filled, and there were plenty of people to work, but nothing was being done.

"The floor was covered with rubbish, the windows were thick with dust and cobwebs; where there were artificial lights they were flickering disagreeably because they were choked with dirt; the machinery creaked abominably, and the air of the place was foul beyond description. Meanwhile orders accumulated, but the people stood around and complained. Some of them were gathered in groups, arguing; others sat on dusty benches, singly or by twos, with discontented, unhappy faces. Some were angry, and others only hopeless, staring straight ahead, with eyes that did not see.

No One Satisfied

"It seemed that no one was satisfied with his lot, and each was eager to change with someone else, who also wanted to change, but not with him. The women whose duty it was to scrub floors wanted to work at the looms, but those at the looms aspired to the big airy room where the bolts of cloth were measured and rolled up.

"The men who had been told to wash windows wanted to make patterns, the man in charge of the ventilating apparatus wanted to work in the office, and the man who was in charge of the office, weary and jaded beyond all power of words to portray, wanted a place at the loom and a pay-envelope every Saturday night instead of a commission upon his sales.

"Those who were supposed to weave blue cloth with white dots upon it wanted to make white cloth with blue dots upon it, but, it seemed, there was no market for the white cloth with the blue dots and they could not be made to understand it.

"The boy who attended to the door of the factory wanted to keep books in the office; the men who were supposed to work in the shipping room wanted to cut out the samples that were sent to different firms to order from. The girls who wrote letters and filed the correspondence wanted to draw designs for new patterns—oh, a great many wanted to draw designs!

"The man who did the designing was complaining of a headache, and wanted to be doorkeeper, that he might have plenty of fresh air. The man who was supposed to oil the machinery wanted to wash the windows—he said it was a cleaner job; and the messengers were tired of going back and forth all day—they wanted to sit quietly and write letters.

"Suddenly an imperious voice called out: 'Each to his own work!' They hesitated for a moment, then obeyed, and presently everything was changed. From confusion and disorder it resolved itself into perfect harmony, for each one was doing his own work and doing it well.

"And, as they worked, the Spirit of Love came among them and the workers began to sing at their tasks. Each one did not only his own work but helped his neighbour with his. They became eager to do all they could instead of as little as they might and still escape censure, and the face of each one was shining with joy.

"When I awoke I was saying aloud: 'Each to his own work!' For some time I did not know it was only a dream, but gradually the meaning of it became clear. Edith, did you ever stop to think that the millennium could be brought about in less than one hour, if each did his own work well and in a spirit of love? It is we ourselves who are out of har-

Joy through Service

mony, not things as they are, and, having once attained harmony, everything will become right.

"And so, beloved, my love for you has been as a great light in my soul. I need no more than to give it without ceasing, and to renew, through human service, not only my love for you, but the love for all which leads to brotherhood.

"I have come to see that joy comes through what we give, not through what we take; happiness through serving, not through being served; and peace through labour, not rest.

"I thought, at first, that I loved you, but it seems to have grown a hundred-fold. No barriers may divide us from one another, nor earth with all its seas sunder us apart, for through love has come union, not only with you but the whole world.

"And so, good-night—heart of my heart, life of my life, and soul of my soul.

"A. M."

"Dear and Ever Dearer:

"Your letter lies against my heart where I feel it with every rising breath. I, too, have longed for you, a thousand times, and in a thousand ways.

"Always as the tide of the night turns, I wake and think of you. When through the darkness comes no response, I smile to myself,

knowing you are asleep, then I sleep also. But sometimes, in an instant, the darkness becomes alive and throbs with eager messages, as love surges from my heart to yours and from yours to mine.

"I, too, have come into the way of service, of brotherhood. It may seem a strange thing to write, or even to say, but you, who have never failed to understand me, will understand this. I never cared so much for my husband as I do now; I was never less conscious of myself, never more eager to ask nothing and give all. And, through this change in me has come about a change in him. Instead of each of us selfishly demanding what we conceive to be our 'rights,' each strives unselfishly to please the other—to see who can give the most.

"You have taken nothing away that belongs to anyone else, dear—the love I bear you is yours alone, but, through it, I have some way more to give; he is the richer, because of you.

"Like you, I have seen before me a multitude of openings, all leading, through ways of self-sacrifice, to the sure finding of one's self. The more love you give, the more you have: it is, in a way, like the old legend of the man who found he could take to Heaven with him only those things which he had given away.

"All around me I see the pitiful mistakes that masquerade as marriage—women who have no virtues save one tied like millstones

A Plea for Rosemary

to some of earth's noblemen; great-hearted and great-souled women mated with clods. I see people insanely jealous of one another, suspicious, fault-finding, malicious; covertly sending barbed shafts to one another through the medium of general conversation. As if love were ever to be held captive, or be won by cords and chains! As if the freest thing on earth would for a moment enter into bondage, or minister unto selfishness when it is, of itself, unselfishness! Passion-slaved and self-bound, they never see beyond their own horizon, nor guess that the great truths of life and love lie just beyond their reach.

"Looking back, I can see one thing that you may have missed. This love of ours has brought joy to you and to me, and, indirectly, happiness to my husband. It has not affected your mother, one way or another, but it has hurt Rosemary—taken away from her the one thing that made her sordid life worth while.

"Dear, can't you see your way clear to make it right with her—to give back at least as much as she had before I came into your life? You will take nothing from me by doing so, for my place with you is secure and beyond the reach of change, as you know yours is with me.

"But, just because the full moon has risen upon midnight, shall we refuse to look at the stars? Believe me, all the lesser loves have

their rightful place, which should be more definitely assured because of the greater light.

"I am pleading not only for her, but for you. Tell her everything, if you choose, or if you feel that you must in order to be honest. I am sure you can make her understand.

"The door of the House of Life is open for you and for me, but it is closed against her. It is in your power at least to set it ajar for her; to admit her, too, into full fellowship through striving and through love.

"She will help you with your vineyard people, and, perhaps, come to peace that way. Her unhappy face as I saw it last haunts me—I cannot help feeling that I am in some way responsible. She needs you and what you can give her, more, perhaps, than I, who shall never have it again.

"Never! The word, as I write it, tolls through my consciousness like a funeral knell. Never to see your face again, or to touch your hand, or to hear you say you love me. Never to feel your arms holding me close, your heart beating against mine, never to thrill with ecstasy in every fibre of me in answer to your kiss.

"Only the silence, broken, perhaps, by an occasional letter, and the call in the night, bridging the darkness and distance between us, to be answered for one little hour by love, surging from one to the other and back again.

Caught in a Web

"And yet these thoughts of ours are as a weaver's shuttle, plying endlessly through the web of night and space and time. One thought may make a slender thread, indeed, but what of the countless thoughts that fly back and forth, weaving and interweaving as they go? Shall they not make first a thread, and then a cord, then a web, and then a fabric, until, at last, there is no separation, but that of the body, which counts for naught?

"Dear Heart, you mean so much to me, are so much. From you and from your love for me I take fresh courage every day. From your strength I make sure of my own strength, from your tenderness I gather compassion, and from your steadfastness I gain the hope that leads me onward, the belief that enables me to face each day bravely and with a smile.

"Deep in my heart, I hold fast to one great joy. Sometimes I close the door quickly upon it and bar up the passage, lest anyone should guess that there, within a bare white chamber, is erected the high altar of my soul, where the lights shine far into the shadows, in spite of rock-hewn portals, closed and barred.

"The knowledge of your love I have with me always, to steady me, to guide me, to uplift me, to make even a grave warm and sweet. And to you, with my own hands, I have brought the divine fire that shall not

fail, so what more need we ask of God, save that somewhere, sometime, in His infinite compassion, we may be together, even though it may be in the House not Made with Hands?

"Remember that I long for you, dream of you, hope for you, believe in you, pray for you, and, above all else, love you, love you—love you. And in all the ways of Heaven and for always, I am thine.

"E."

XXIII

Betrothal

On the Hills by the Vineyard

DESOLATION lay upon the vineyard. The fairy lace had been rudely torn aside by invading storms and the Secret Spinners had entered upon their long sleep. The dead leaves rustled back and forth, shivering with the cold, when the winds came down upon the river from the hill. Caught, now and then, upon some whirling gust, the leaves were blown to the surface of the river itself, and, like scuttled craft, swept hastily to ports unknown.

Rosemary escaped from the house early in the afternoon. Unable to go to the Hill of the Muses, or up the river-road, she had taken a long, roundabout path around the outskirts of the village and so reached the hills back of the vineyard. The air of the valley seemed to suffocate her; she longed to climb to the silent places, where the four winds of heaven kept tryst.

She was alone, as always. She sighed as she remembered how lonely she had been all her

In Real Life

life. Except Alden, there had never been anyone to whom she could talk freely. Even at school, the other children had, by common consent, avoided the solitary, silent child who sat apart, always, in brown gingham or brown alpaca, and taking refuge in the fierce pride that often shields an abnormal sensitiveness.

She sat down upon the cold, damp earth and leaned against a tree, wondering if it would not be possible for her to take cold and die. In the books, people died when they wanted to, or, what was more to the point, when other people wanted them to. It was wonderful, when you came to think of it, how Death invariably aided Art.

But, in real life, things were pitifully different. People who ought not to die did so, and those who could well be spared clung to mortal existence as though they had drunk deeply of the fabled fountain of immortal youth.

Descending to personalities, Rosemary reflected upon the ironical Fate that had taken her father and mother away from her, and spared Grandmother and Aunt Matilda. Or, if she could have gone with her father and mother, it would have been all right—Rosemary had no deep longing for life considered simply as existence. Bitterness and the passion of revolt swayed her for the moment, though she knew that the mood would pass,

A Mystery

as it always did, when she took her soul into the sanctuary of the hills.

Dispassionately she observed her feet, stretched out in front of her, and compared them with Mrs. Lee's. Rosemary's shoes were heavy and coarse, they had low, broad heels and had been patched and mended until the village cobbler had proclaimed himself at the end of his resources. Once or twice she had said, half-fearfully, that she needed new shoes, but Grandmother had not seemed to hear.

Father had meant for her to have everything she wanted—he had said so, in the letter which at that moment lay against Rosemary's bitter young heart. He would have given her a pair of slippers like those Mrs. Lee had worn the day she went there to tea—black satin, with high heels and thin soles, cunningly embroidered with tiny steel beads. How small and soft the foot had seemed above the slipper; how subtly the flesh had gleamed through the fine black silk stocking!

She wondered whether father knew. No, probably not, for if he did, he would find some way to come and have it out with Grandmother—she was sure of that. God knew, of course—God knew everything, but why had He allowed Grandmother to do it? It was an inscrutable mystery to her that a Being with infinite power should allow things to go wrong.

For the moment Rosemary's faith wavered.

Startled

then re-asserted itself. It was she who did not understand: the ways of the Everlasting were not her ways, and, moreover, they were beyond her finite comprehension. If she waited, and trusted, and meanwhile did the best she could, everything would be right somewhere, sometime. That must be what Heaven was, a place where things were always right for everybody.

Gradually her resentment passed away. The impassioned yearning for life, in all its fulness, that once had shaken her to the depths of her soul, had ceased to trouble or to beckon. It had become merely a question of getting through with this as creditably and easily as she might, and passing on to the next, whatever that might prove to be.

The ground upon which she sat was cold and damp. Rosemary shivered a little and was glad. Release might come in that way, though she doubted it. She was too hopelessly healthy ever to take cold, and in all her five and twenty years had never had a day's illness.

A step beside her startled her and a kindly voice said: "Why, Rosemary! You 'll take cold!"

Crimson with embarrassment she sprang to her feet, shaking the soil from her skirts. "I—I did n't hear you coming," she stammered. "I must go."

New Plans

"Please don't," Alden responded. "Remember how long it is since I 've seen you. How did you happen to come up here?"

"Because—oh, I don't know! I 've come sometimes to see the vineyard. I 've—I 've liked to watch the people at work," she concluded, lamely. "I see so few people, you know."

Alden's face softened with vague tenderness. "Was it just this last Summer you 've been coming, or has it been all along ?"

"I 've always come—ever since I was big enough to climb the hill. I—I used to steal grapes sometimes," she confessed, "before I knew it was wrong."

"You can have all the grapes you want," he laughed. "I 'll send you a basket every day, if you want them, as long as the season lasts. Why did n't you tell me before ?"

"I—I never thought," she answered. She might have added that she was not accustomed to the idea of any sort of gift, but she did not put the thought into words.

"Come over here, Rosemary. I want to show you something—tell you about some new plans of mine."

He led her to the group of workers' houses back of the pines. A great deal of repairing had been done and every house was habitable, if not actually comfortable. They had all been furnished with quiet good taste, and had

The Hospital

been freshly whitewashed, both inside and out. There was a great pile of cots and a stack of new blankets.

"What is it?" asked Rosemary, much interested.

"The Marsh Tuberculosis Hospital," he answered. His face was beaming.

"I—I don't understand."

"Don't you? Well, it's simple enough. If I hadn't been all kinds of an idiot and blindly selfish I'd have thought of it before. One of the men who came to pick grapes this year has a wife at home with tuberculosis. All she needs is to lie on a cot outdoors and have plenty of fresh eggs and milk. He's coming to-morrow, with her, and his two children. The girl will learn housekeeping from mother daytimes and the boy will go to school. I have room for several others if I can find them, and I have people in town hunting them up for me. See?"

"Oh!" said Rosemary. "How beautiful! How good you are!"

"Not good," said Alden, shamefacedly, digging at the soil with his heel. "Merely decent—that's all." He took a spring cot out of the pile, spread a blanket upon it, and invited Rosemary to sit down.

"It is beautiful," she insisted. "no matter what you say. How lovely it must be to be able to do things for people—to give them what

The Gift and the Giver

they need! Oh," she breathed, "if I could only help!"

Alden looked at her keenly. "You can, Rosemary."

"How?"

"I don't know, but there 's always a way, if one wants to help."

"I have nothing to give," she murmured. "I have n't anything of my own but my mother's watch, and that won't go, so it would n't be of any use to anybody."

"Someone said once," he continued, "that 'the gift without the giver is bare.' That means that what you give does n't count unless you also give yourself."

"'To give yourself,'" she repeated; then, all at once, her face illumined. "I see now!" she cried. "I can give myself! They 'll need someone to take care of them, and I can do that. I can cook and scrub floors and keep everything clean, and—but Grandmother won't let me," she concluded, sadly.

A paragraph from Edith's letter flashed vividly into his memory: *"The door of the House of Life is open for you and for me, but it is closed against her. It is in your power at least to set it ajar for her; to admit her, too, into full fellowship, through striving and through love."*

His heart yearned toward her unspeakably. They belonged to one another in ways

What For?

that Edith had no part in and never could have. Suddenly, without looking at her, he said: "Rosemary, will you marry me?"

She turned to him, startled, then averted her face. Every vestige of colour was gone, even from her lips. "Don't!" she said, brokenly. "Don't make fun of me. I must go."

She rose to her feet, trembling, but he caught her hand and held her back. "Look at me, dear. I 'm not making fun of you. I mean it—every word."

She sat down beside him, then, well out of reach of his outstretched hand. "What for?" she asked, curiously.

"Because I want you."

"I—I don't understand."

"Don't you love me?"

"You have no right to ask me that." Her tone was harsh and tremulous with suppressed emotion.

"No," he agreed, after a pause, "I suppose I have n't." She did not answer, so, after a little, he rose and stood before her, forcing her eyes to meet his.

"Do you—know?" he asked.

Rosemary hesitated for a moment. "Yes, I—know," she said, in a different tone.

"And that was why you——"

"Yes." Her voice was scarcely audible now.

"It was n't true, then, that you did n't love me?"

Alden Confesses

She turned upon him fiercely. "What right have you to ask me all these questions?" she cried, passionately. "What have you to offer me? How can you take all I have to give and give me nothing in return? What is your love worth? What do you think I am? The plaything of an idle hour, something to be taken up or cast aside whenever you may choose, to be treated kindly or brutally as your fancy may dictate, to be insulted by your pity—by what you call your love? No, a thousand times no!"

His face was very white and his mouth twitched, but in a moment he had gained, in a measure, his self-control. "I don't blame you in the least, Rosemary. I deserve it all, I know. But, before you condemn me utterly, will you listen to me for a few moments?"

She assented, by the merest inclination of her head.

"I want to be honest with you," he went on, clearing his throat, "and I want to be honest with myself. No doubt you think I 'm all kinds of a cad, and rightly so, but, at least, I 've been honest—that is, I 've tried to be.

"When I asked you to marry me, early in the Spring, I meant it, just as I mean it now, and I was glad when you said you would. Then—she came.

"I had nothing whatever to do with her coming, in fact, I protested against it, as

mother will tell you if you ask her. I did n't know her, and I did n't want her, but after I knew her——"

Alden Was Glad

"You did want her," said Rosemary, coldly.

"Yes, I wanted her, and she was married to another man. She had sufficient grounds for a divorce, though she never told me what they were, and I pleaded with her to take advantage of the opportunity. I tried by every means in my power to persuade her, and when you—released me——"

"You were glad," she said, finishing the sentence for him.

"Yes," he replied, in a low tone, "I was glad. She decided, finally, to leave it to him. If he wanted her back, she would go; if he preferred his freedom, she would give it to him. And, of course, he wanted her, and he had the right."

"So she went."

"So she went, and it was all over, and we shall never see each other again."

"It 's too bad," said Rosemary, icily. "I 'm sorry for you both."

"Listen dear," he pleaded. His face was working piteously now. "I wish I could make you understand. I loved her, and I love her still. I shall love her as long as I live, and perhaps even after I 'm dead. And she loves me. But, because of it, in some strange way that I don't comprehend

He States His Case

myself, I seem to have more love to give—others.

"I care more for my mother because I love—Edith, and, queer as you may think it, I care more for you. She has taken nothing away from you that I ever gave you—you are dearer to me to-day than when I first asked you to marry me, so long ago. I don't suppose you 'll believe it, but it 's the truth."

"I believe what you tell me," Rosemary said, in a different tone, "but I don't understand it."

"It 's like this, Rosemary. My loving her has been like opening the door into the House of Life. It 's made everything different for me. It 's made me want to make the best of myself, to do things for people, to be kind to everybody. It is n't selfishness—it 's unselfishness.

"I told you once that I wanted to take you away from all that misery, and to make you happy. It was true then, and it 's true now, but, at that time, I was bound in shallows and did n't know it. She came into my life like an overwhelming flood, and swept me out to sea. Now I 'm back in the current again, but I shall know the shallows no more—thank God!

"If you 'll believe me, I have more to give than I had then—and I want you more. I 'm very lonely, Rosemary, and shall be always,

A Philanthropic Scheme

unless—but, no, I don't want your pity; I want your love."

There was a long pause, then Rosemary spoke. "Service," she said, half to herself, "and sacrifice. Giving, not receiving. Asking, not answer."

"Yes," returned Alden, with a sigh, "it 's all of that.

"Leaving love aside," he went on, after a little, "I believe you 'd be happier here, with mother and me, than you are where you are now. You 'd be set free from all that drudgery, you could help me in my work, and, though I 'm not rich, I could give you a few of the pretty things you 've always wanted. We could go to town occasionally and see things. Moreover, I could take care of you, and you 've never been taken care of. I don't think you 'd ever be sorry, Rosemary, even though you don't love me."

"I never said I did n't love you," the girl faltered. Her eyes were downcast and the colour was burning upon her pale face.

"Yes, you did—up on the hill. Don't you remember ?"

"I—I was n't telling the truth," she confessed. "I 've—I 've always——"

"Rosemary!"

She looked at him with brimming eyes. "What you 've done, or what you may do, does n't make any difference. It never could.

Her Very Own

If—if it depends at all on—on the other person, I don't think—it 's love."

In an instant his arms were around her, and she was crying happily upon his shoulder. "Dear, my dear! And you cared all the time?"

"All the time," she sobbed.

"What a brute I was! How I must have hurt you!"

"You could n't help it. You did n't mean to hurt me."

"No, of course not, but, none the less I did it. I 'll spend the rest of my life trying to make up for it, dear, if you 'll let me."

It flashed upon Rosemary that this was not at all like the impassioned love-making to which she had been an unwilling witness, but, none the less, it was sweet, and it was her very own. He wanted her, and merely to be wanted, anywhere, gives a certain amount of satisfaction.

"Kiss me, dear." Rosemary put up her trembling lips, answering to him with every fibre of body and soul.

"Don't cry, dear girl, please don't! I want to make you happy."

Rosemary released herself, wiped her eyes upon a coarse handkerchief, then asked the inevitable question:

"Will she care?"

"No, she 'll be glad. Mother will too."

A Promise

"Grandmother won't," she laughed, hysterically, "nor Aunt Matilda."

"Never mind them. You've considered them all your life, now it's your turn."

"It doesn't seem that I deserve it," whispered Rosemary, with touching humility. "I've never been happy, except for a little while this Spring, and now——"

"And now," he said, taking her into his arms again, "you're going to be happy all the rest of your life, if I can make you so. If I don't you'll tell me, won't you?"

"I can't promise," she murmured, shyly, to his coat sleeve. "I must go now, it's getting late."

"Not until you've told me when you'll marry me. To-morrow?"

"Oh, no!" cried Rosemary. "Not to-morrow."

"Why not?"

"It's—it's too soon."

"In a week, then?"

"I—I don't know. I'll see."

"Make it very soon, my dear, will you?"

"Yes—just as soon as I can."

"Is that a promise?"

"Yes—a promise."

"Then kiss me."

The white fire burned in Rosemary's blood; her heart beat hard with rapturous pain. Upon the desert wastes that stretched end-

Half Afraid

lessly before her, Spring had come with the old, immortal beauty, and more than mortal joy. Half afraid of her own ecstasy, she broke away from him and ran home.

XXIV

The Minister's Call

"ROSEMARY!"

Grandmother called imperiously, but there was no answer. "Rosemary!" she cried, shrilly.

Just Wait

"She ain't here, Ma," said Matilda. "I reckon she 's gone out somewheres."

"Did you ever see the beat of it? She 's getting high and mighty all of a sudden. This makes twice lately that she 's gone out without even tellin' us, let alone askin' whether she could go or not. Just wait till she comes back."

Matilda laughed in her most aggravating manner. "I reckon we 'll have to wait," she retorted, "as long as we don't know where she 's gone or when she 's comin' back."

"Just wait," repeated Grandmother, ominously. "I 'll tell her a thing or two. You just see if I don't!"

The fires of her wrath smouldered dully, ready to blaze forth at any moment. Matilda waited with the same sort of pleasurable

Tense Silence

excitement which impels a child to wait under the open window of a house in which there is good reason to believe that an erring playmate is about to receive punishment.

"What 's she been doin' all day?" Grandmother demanded.

"Nothin' more than usual, I guess," Matilda replied. "She did up the work this morning and got dinner, and washed the dishes and went to the store, and when she come back, she was up in the attic for a spell, and then she went out without sayin' where she was goin'."

"In the attic? What was she doin' in the attic?"

"I don't know, I 'm sure."

"She 's got no call to go to the attic. If I want her to go up there, I 'll tell her so. This is my house."

"Yes," returned Matilda, with a sigh. "I 've heard tell that it was."

"Humph!" grunted Grandmother.

For an hour or more there was silence, not peaceful, but tense, for Grandmother was thinking of things she might say to the wayward Rosemary. Then the culprit came in, cheerfully singing to herself, and unmindful of impending judgment.

"Rosemary!"

"Yes, Grandmother. What is it?"

"Come here!"

Grandmother Chides Rosemary

Rosemary obeyed readily enough, though she detected warlike possibilities in the tone.

"Set down! I 've got something to say to you!"

"I have something to say to you, too, Grandmother," Rosemary replied, taking the chair indicated by the shaking forefinger. For the first time in her life she was not afraid of the old lady.

"I 've noticed," Grandmother began, tremulously, "that you 're getting high and mighty all of a sudden. You 've gone out twice lately without askin' if you might go, and I won't have it. Do you understand?"

"I hear you," the girl answered. "Is that all?"

"No, 't ain't all. You don't seem to have any sense of your position. Here you are a poor orphan, beholden to your grandmother for every mouthful you eat and all the clothes you wear, and if you can't behave yourself better 'n you 've been doin', you shan't stay."

A faint smile appeared around the corners of Rosemary's mouth, then vanished. "Very well, Grandmother," she answered, demurely, rising from her chair. "I 'll go whenever you want me to. Shall I go now?"

"Set down," commanded the old lady. "I 'd like to know where you 'd go!"

"I 'd go to Mrs. Marsh's; I think she 'd take me in."

Rosemary's Rejoinder

"You 've got another think comin' then," Grandmother sneered. "Did n't I tell you to set down ?"

"Yes," returned Rosemary, coolly, "but I 'm not going to. I said I had something to say to you. I 'm going to be married next week to Alden Marsh. I 've taken enough of the money my father left me to buy a white dress and a new hat, and the storekeeper has sent to the City for me for some white shoes and stockings. I 'm going to have some pretty underwear, too, and a grey travelling dress. I 've just come from the dressmakers, now."

"Money!" screamed the old lady. "So that 's what you 've been doin' in the attic. You 're a thief, that 's what you are! Your mother was——"

"Stop!" said Rosemary. Her voice was low and controlled, but her face was very white. "Not another word against my mother. You 've slandered her for the last time. I am not a poor orphan, beholden to my grandmother for the food I eat and the clothes I wear. On the contrary, you and Aunt Matilda are dependent upon me, and have been for a good many years. I have father's letter here. Do you care to read it ?"

Shaken from head to foot, the old lady sank into her chair. She was speechless, but her eyes blazed. Matilda sat by the window, dumb with astonishment. This was not at all what

she had expected. Rosemary had drawn a yellow old letter from the recesses of her brown gingham gown and was offering it to Grandmother. The sight of it had affected the old lady powerfully.

"Very well," Rosemary was saying, as she returned the letter to its hiding-place. "In case you've forgotten, I'll tell you what's in it. The day father sailed up the coast, he sent you a draft for more than eleven thousand dollars. He said it was for me—for my clothes and my education, in case anything happened to him. He said that you were to give me whatever I might want or need, as long as the money lasted. I'll leave it to you whether you've carried out his instructions or not.

"Now that I'm going to be married, I've taken the liberty of helping myself to a small part of what is my own. There's almost two thousand dollars left, and you're quite welcome to it, but I won't be married in brown gingham nor go to my husband in ragged shoes, and if I think of anything else I want, I'm going to have it."

"Ma," said Matilda, tremulously, "if this is so, we ain't done right by Rosemary."

"It's so," Rosemary continued, turning toward the figure at the window. "You can read the letter if you want to." She put her hand to her breast again, but Matilda shook her head.

Grandmother's Decision

"If you want me to," the girl went on, "I 'll go now. Mrs. Marsh will take me in, but I 'll have to explain why I ask it. I have n't told Alden, or his mother, and I don't want to. I won't bring shame upon those of my own blood if I can help it. But what I 've had, I 've earned, and I don't feel indebted to you for anything, not even a single slice of bread. That 's all."

Grandmother staggered to her feet, breathing heavily. Her face was colourless, her lips ashen grey. "Rosemary Starr," she said, with long pauses between the words, "I 'll never—speak to—you—again as—long as—I —live." Then she fell back into her chair, with her hand upon her heart.

"Very well, Grandmother," Rosemary returned, shrugging her shoulders. "You 'll have to do as you like about that."

By supper-time the household was calm again—upon the surface. True to her word, Grandmother refused to communicate directly with Rosemary. She treated the girl as she might a piece of furniture—unworthy of attention except in times of actual use.

She conveyed her wishes through Matilda, as a sort of human telephone. "Matilda," she would say, "will you ask Rosemary to fill the tea-pot with hot water?" And, again: "Matilda, will you tell Rosemary to put out the milk pitcher and to lock the back door?"

Left in the Dark

It was not necessary, however, for Matilda to tell Rosemary. The girl accepted the requests as though they had been given directly —with her head held high and the faintest shadow of an ironical smile upon her face.

After supper, while Rosemary was washing the dishes, Grandmother took the lamp. She was half-way to the door when Matilda inquired: "Where are you goin', Ma?"

"I 'm goin' up to my room, to set and read a spell."

"But—but the lamp?"

"I need it to read by," Grandmother announced, with considerable asperity, "and you don't need to hunt around for no more lamps, neither. I 've got 'em all put away."

"But," Matilda objected; "me and Rosemary——"

"You and Rosemary! Humph! You can set in the dark or anywhere else you please." With that she slammed the door and was gone. Rosemary came in, after a little, humming to herself with an assumed cheerfulness she was far from feeling. Then she went out into the kitchen and came back with a match. The feeble flicker of it revealed only Aunt Matilda —and no lamp.

"Where 's Grandmother?" asked Rosemary, in astonishment. "And what has become of the lamp?"

"She 's gone up to her room and she 's

Aunt Matilda's Troubles

took the lamp with her." Matilda laughed, hysterically.

Rosemary brought in the candle from the kitchen. As it happened, it was the last candle and was nearly gone, but it would burn for an hour or two.

"I 'm sorry, Aunt Matilda," said Rosemary, kindly, "if you want to read, or anything——"

"I don't," she interrupted. "I 'd like to sit and talk a spell. I don't know as we need the candle. If she should happen to come back, she 'd be mad. She said she 'd put away the lamps, and I reckon she 'd have took the candle, too, if she 'd thought."

"Very well," answered Rosemary, blowing out the candle. "I 'm not afraid of the dark." Moreover, it was not the general policy of the household to ruffle Grandmother's temper unnecessarily.

"Rosemary," said Aunt Matilda, a little later; "Ma 's a hard woman—she always has been."

"Yes," the girl agreed, listlessly.

"I ain't never said much, but I 've had my own troubles. I 've tried to bear 'em patiently, but sometimes I ain't been patient—she 's always made me feel so ugly."

Rosemary said nothing, but she felt a strange softening of her heart toward Aunt Matilda. "I don't know as you 'll believe me," the older woman went on after a pause,

Pity for Aunt Matilda

"but I never knew nothin' about that money."

"I know you did n't, Aunt Matilda. It 's behind a loose brick in the chimney, in the attic, on the right-hand side. You have to stand on a chair to reach it. If you want any of it, go and help yourself. It 's mine, and you 're welcome to it, as far as I 'm concerned."

"I don't know what I 'd want," returned Matilda, gloomily. "I ain't never had nothin', and I 've sort of got out of the habit. I did used to think that if it ever come my way, I 'd like a white straw hat with red roses on it, but I 'm too old for it now."

Tears of pity filled Rosemary's eyes and a lump rose in her throat. Aunt Matilda's deprivations had been as many as her own, and had extended over a much longer period. The way of escape was open for Rosemary, but the older woman must go on, hopelessly, until the end.

"It was sixteen years ago to-night," said Aunt Matilda, dreamily, "that the minister come to call."

"Was it?" asked Rosemary. She did not know what else to say.

"I thought maybe you 'd remember it, but I guess you was too little. You was only nine, and you used to go to bed at half-past seven. It was five minutes of eight when he come."

The Minister Asks to Call

"Was it?" asked Rosemary, again.

"Yes. Don't you remember hearin' the door bell ring?"

"No—I must have been asleep."

"Children go to sleep awful quick. It was five minutes of eight when he come."

"Were you expecting him?"

"No, I was n't. He 'd said to me once, on the way out of church after Sunday-school; 'Miss Matilda, I must be comin' over to see you some one of these pleasant evenings, with your kind permission.' Just like that, he says, 'with your kind permission.' I was so flustered I could n't say much, but I did manage to tell him that Ma and me would be pleased to see him any time, and what do you suppose he said?"

"I don't know," answered Rosemary.

"He said: 'It 's you I 'm comin' to see—not your Ma.' Just like that—'It 's you!' " Her voice had a new note in it—a strange thrill of tenderness.

"And so," she went on, after a pause, "he come. I was wearin' my brown alpaca that I 'd just finished. I 'd tried it on after supper to see if it was all right, and it was, so I kept on wearin' it, though Ma was tellin' me all the time to take it off. Her and me had just cleaned the parlour that day. It could n't have happened better. And when the bell rang, I went to the door myself."

"Were you surprised?"

"My land, yes! I 'd thought maybe he 'd come, but not without tellin' me when, or askin' for permission, as he 'd said. He come in and took off his hat just like he was expected, and he shook hands with Ma and me. He only said 'How do you do Mis' Starr?' to her, but to me, he says: 'I 'm glad to see you, Miss Matilda. How well you 're looking!' Yes—just like that.

"We went and set down in the parlour. I 'd cleaned the lamp that day, too—it was the same lamp Ma 's took up-stairs with her now. It was on the centre-table, by the basket of wax-flowers under the glass shade. They was almost new then and none of 'em was broken. They looked awful pretty.

"Ma came in the parlour, too, and she set down between him and me, and she says: 'I 've been wantin' to ask you something ever since I heard your last sermon, three weeks ago come Sunday. I ain't been to church since and I can't feel like I ought to go.'

" 'I 'm sorry,' he says, just as gentle. 'If you have any doubts that I can clear up,' he says, 'about the Scripture——'

" ''T ain't the Scripture I 'm doubtin',' says Ma, 'it 's you.'

" 'That is n't as bad,' he says, smilin', but I could see he was scared. You know

Discussing Baptism

how Ma is—especially when you ain't used to her.

"'I 'd like to ask,' says Ma, 'whether you believe that unbaptised infants is goin' to be saved.'

"'Why, yes,' he says. 'I do.'

"'I suspicioned it,' Ma says. Oh, her voice was awful! 'May I ask you just what grounds you have for believin' such a thing?'

"'I don't know as I could tell you just what grounds I have,' he says, 'but I certainly feel that the God I humbly try to serve is not only just but merciful. And if there 's anything on earth purer or more like a flower than a little baby,' he says, 'I don't know what it is, whether it 's been baptised or not. I don't think God cares so much about forms and ceremonies as he does about people's hearts.' Them 's the very words he said.

"Well," resumed Matilda, after a pause, "Ma was bent on arguin' with him, about that, and baptisin' by sprinklin' or by immersion, and about the lost tribes of Israel, and goodness knows what else. He did n't want to argue, and was all the time tryin' to change the subject, but it was no use. I never got a chance to say a dozen words to him, and finally, when he got up to go, he says: 'I 've had a very pleasant evenin', and I 'd like to come again sometime soon, if I may,' he says. Just like that.

"And before I could say a word, Ma had said: 'I dunno as we feel ourselves in need of your particular brand of theology,' she says. 'It 's my opinion that you ought to be up before the trustees instead of around callin' on faithful members of the church, sowin' the seeds of doubt in their minds.' "

"His face turned bright red, but he shook hands with Ma, very polite, and with me. I 've always thought he squeezed my hand a little. And he says to me, very pleasant: 'Good-night, Miss Matilda,' but that was all, for Ma went to the door with him and banged it shut before he 'd got down the steps.

"The day before he went away, I met him in the post-office, accidental, and he says: 'Miss Matilda, I 've got somethin' for you if you 'll accept it,' and he took me over to one side where there could n't nobody see us, and he give me his tintype. And he says: 'I hope you 'll always remember me, Miss Matilda. You 'll promise not to forget me, won't you?'

"And I promised," she resumed, "and I ain't. I 've always remembered."

There was a long silence, then Miss Matilda cleared her throat. "Light the candle, Rosemary, will you?"

When the tiny flame appeared, Rosemary saw that the older woman's face was wet with unaccustomed tears. She reached down into the bosom of her dress and drew out a small

It Might Have Been

packet, which she removed carefully from its many wrappings. "See," she said.

Rosemary leaned over to look at the pictured face. The heavy beard did not wholly conceal the sensitive, boyish mouth, and even the crude art had faithfully portrayed the dreamy, boyish eyes.

"I want to ask you something," Aunt Matilda said, as she wrapped it up again. "You 're going to be married yourself, now, and you 'll know about such things. Do you think, if it had n't been for Ma, it might have been—anything?"

Rosemary put out the light. "I 'm sure it would," she said, kindly.

"Oh, Rosemary!" breathed the other, with a quick indrawing of the breath. "Are you truly sure?"

"Truly," said Rosemary, very softly. Then she added, convincingly: "You know Alden 's never been to see me but once, and I have n't even a tintype of him, and yet we 're going to be married."

"That 's so. I had n't thought of that. I guess you 're right." Then she added, generously, "I 'm glad you 're goin' to be married, Rosemary, and I hope you 'll be happy. You 've got it comin' to you."

"Thank you," said Rosemary, choking a little on the words. "Thank you, dear Aunt Matilda." Then someway, in the dark, their arms found each other and their lips met.

XXV

A Wedding

THE air was crystalline and cool, yet soft, and full of a mysterious, spicy fragrance. Blue skies arched down at the vast curve of the horizon to meet a bluer sea. Snowy gulls swept lazily through the clear blue spaces, their hoarse crying softened into a weird music. Upon the dazzling reaches of white sand, Rosemary was walking with Alden. By the Sea

He had his arm around her and her face was turned toward his. He was radiant with youth and the joy of living. It was in the spring of his step upon the sand, the strong, muscular lines of his body, and, more than all, in his face. In his eyes were the strange, sweet fires that Rosemary had seen the day she was hidden in the thicket and saw him holding Edith in his arms. But it was all for her now, for Rosemary, and the past was as dead as though it had never been.

As they walked, they talked, saying to each other the thousand dear and foolish

A Stroke

things that lovers have said since, back in the Garden, the First Woman looked into the eyes of the First Man and knew that God had made her to be his mate. Suddenly a white cliff loomed up on the beach before them and from its depths came a tremendous knocking, as though some one were endeavouring to escape from a hopeless fastness of stone.

They paused, but the knocking continued, growing louder and louder. Then a hoarse voice called "Rosemary! Rosemary!"

The girl came to herself with a start, rubbing her eyes. Gaunt and grey in the first dim light of morning, Aunt Matilda stood over her, clad in a nondescript dressing-gown.

"Rosemary!" she whispered, shrilly. "Come quick! Ma's had a stroke!"

They ran back to the old lady's room. In the girl's confused remembrance the narrow hallway seemed to be a continuation of the white, sunlit beach, with the blue sky and sea changed to faded wall paper, and the cliff gone.

Grandmother lay upon her bed, helpless, uttering harsh, guttural sounds that seemingly bore no relation to speech. Her eyes blazed at the sight of Rosemary and she tried to sit up in bed, but could not.

"When?" asked Rosemary.

"Just now," Aunt Matilda answered. "I was asleep, and when I woke up I heard her.

She must have woke me up. What shall we do?" she continued, helplessly, after a pause.

"I don't know," Rosemary whispered, almost stunned by the shock. "I 'll dress and go for the doctor."

In an hour she had returned with the physician, who felt the old lady's pulse, and shook his head. In the hall, he interviewed the other two.

"Has she had any shock?" he asked.

For a moment there was no answer, then Matilda answered clearly: "No."

"No," echoed Rosemary.

"No unusual excitement of any sort? Or no bad news?"

"Not that I know of," Matilda replied, calmly.

"Nothing unusual," Rosemary assured him.

"Extraordinary!" he murmured. "I 'll be in again this afternoon."

When he had gone, Aunt Matilda turned anxiously to Rosemary. "Do you think we did right? Should n't we have told him?"

"I don't know what difference it could make," Rosemary replied, thoughtfully. "I 'd hate to have anybody know what she 's done. Maybe it 's my fault," she went on, sadly. "Perhaps I should n't have told her."

"Don't go to blaming yourself, Rosemary. I don't know why you should n't have told

Unable to Speak

her. If I 'd been you, I 'd have told her long ago—or had you just found it out?"

"I 've known for quite a while. I don't think I 'd have said anything, though, if I was n't going to be married. It did n't seem as if I could be married in brown gingham when father meant for me to have everything I wanted and the money was there."

"Don't worry about it for a minute," said Aunt Matilda, kindly. "You 've done just right and you ain't to blame for what 's happened. It 's her own fault."

Rosemary prepared a breakfast tray and Matilda took it up. "It 's better for you to stay away, Rosemary," she said, "for we don't want her to get excited." When she returned, she reported that the old lady had, with evident difficulty, eaten a little oatmeal and choked down a cup of coffee. She was calmer, but unable to speak.

The unaccustomed silence of the house affected them both strangely. Grandmother might be upstairs and helpless but the powerful impress of her personality still lingered in the rooms below. Her red-and-black plaid shawl, hanging from the back of her chair, conveyed a subtle restraint; the chair itself seemed as though she had just left it and was likely to return to it at any moment.

When the doctor came again, in the afternoon, Matilda went up-stairs with him, while

The Doctor's Word

Rosemary waited anxiously in the dining-room. It seemed a long time until they came back and held a brief whispered conference at the front door. When he finally went out, Matilda came into the dining-room, literally tense with excitement.

"He says," she began, sinking into a chair, "that he don't know. I like it in him myself, for a doctor that 'll admit he don't know, when he don't, instead of leavin' you to find out by painful experience, is not only scarce, but he 's to be trusted when you come across him.

"He says she may get better and she may not—that in a little while she may be up and movin' around and talkin' again about the same as she always did, and again, she may stay just like she is, or get worse. He said he 'd do what he could, but he could n't promise anything—that only time would tell.

"If she stays like this, she 's got to be took care of just the same as if she was a baby—fed and turned over and bathed,—and if she gets better she can help herself some. Seems funny, don't it? Yesterday she was rampagin' around and layin' down the law to you, and to-day she can't say yes or no."

"She said yesterday," Rosemary returned, "that she 'd never speak to me again as long as she lived. I wonder if it 's true!"

"I wonder!" echoed Matilda. "I 'd forgotten that."

The Way of Sacrifice

"I had n't," said the girl, with a grim smile.

"Seems almost as if it might be a judgment on her," Matilda observed, after a pause. "She said she 'd never speak to you again and she may never speak to anybody any more. And I 've got to take care of her. That's the trouble with judgments—they never hit just the person they were meant to hit. We 're all so mixed up that somebody else has to be dragged into it."

Plainly before Rosemary there opened the way of sacrifice and denial. For a moment she hesitated, then offered up her joy on the altar of duty.

"I won't be married, Aunt Matilda," she said, bravely, though her mouth quivered. "I 'll stay and help you."

"What?"

"I said I would n't be married. I 'll— I 'll tell Alden I can't. I 'll stay and help you."

"You won't. I won't have you speak of such a thing, let alone doing it."

"You can't help it, if I make up my mind."

"Yes, I can. I 'll go and see Mrs. Marsh, and him, and the minister, and the doctor, and everybody. I 'll tell 'em all everything. You go right on ahead with your gettin' married. I ain't goin' to have your life spoiled the way mine has been. You 're young yet and you 've got a right to it."

"But—but, Aunt Matilda!"

"Aunt Matilda nothin'! What could you do, anyhow? She don't want you anywheres near her, and the doctor said she must n't be excited."

"I could do what I 've always done—cooking and cleaning and washing and ironing, and I could carry things up-stairs for you."

"Maybe you could, Rosemary, but you ain't goin' to. You 've served out your time. Don't you worry about me—I ain't goin' to kill myself."

"I—I wish you 'd let me," Rosemary stammered.

"Well, I won't, and that 's the end of it. I 'll get along someways. The minister used to say that when God gave any of us a burden we could n't carry by ourselves, He 'd always send help, so, if I need help, I 'll have it.

"I 'll enjoy myself, too, in a way," she went on, after a little. "It 's goin' to seem awful peaceful to have the house quiet, with no talkin' nor argument goin' on in it. Sometimes I 've thought that if I could get out of the sound of the human voice for a spell I would n't feel so ugly. It 's wore on me considerable—never bein' alone except nights or when I went up-stairs afternoons and pretended to take a nap. Lots of times I was n't lyin' down at all—I was just settin' there, with the door locked, thinkin' how nice and quiet it

The Wedding Dawn

was. Ma 'll get a good rest, too, while she ain't talkin', though it ain't for me to say she 's needed it."

"So," she continued, clearing her throat, "you go right on ahead with your marrying."

Rosemary bent and kissed the hollow, withered cheek. "I will," she said. "Oh, dear Aunt Matilda! I wish you had n't missed it all!"

The older woman's steel blue eyes softened, then filled. "Maybe I 've missed it and maybe I ain't," she said, huskily. "Maybe this life is only a discipline to fit us for somethin' better that 's comin'. Anyway, if we keep on goin' and doin' the best we can as we go, I believe God will make it right for us later on."

The morning of Rosemary's wedding dawned clear and cool. It was Autumn and yet the sweetness of Summer still lingered in the air. Scarlet banners trailed upon the maples and golden leaves rained from the birches, shimmering as they fell. Amethystine haze lay upon the valley, shot through with silver gleams from the river that murmured toward the sea with the sound of far waters asleep.

Purple lights laid enchantment upon the distant hills, where the Tapestry-Maker had stored her threads—great skeins of crimson and golden green, russet and flaming orange,

Making Ready

to be woven into the warp and woof of September by some magic of starlight and dawn. Lost rainbows and forgotten sunsets had mysteriously come back, to lie for a moment upon hill or river, and then to disappear.

Noon had been chosen for the ceremony, in the little church at the foot of the Hill of the Muses, for, as Alden had said, with a laugh, "even though it was private, it might as well be fashionable." Aunt Matilda was up at dawn, putting new lace into the neck and sleeves of her best brown alpaca, as tremulous and anxious as though she herself were to be the bride.

Rosemary had packed her few belongings the day before, in the little old-fashioned trunk that had been her mother's. As she dressed, Aunt Matilda sat on the bed, pathetically eager to help in some way, though it might be only to pin up a stray lock or tie a shoe.

Rosemary shook out the dull ashen masses of her hair with a sigh. As she put it up, Alden's big betrothal diamond blazed starlike upon her rough, red hand. She contemplated it ruefully—it seemed so out of place—then brightened at the memory of the promise Mrs. Marsh had made so long ago.

"She 'll teach me how to take care of my hands," said Rosemary, half to herself, "so they 'll look like hers."

"She?" repeated Aunt Matilda. "Who?"

Matilda's Compensation

"Mrs. Marsh—mother."

"Yes, I guess she will. She'll teach you a lot of things Ma and me have never heard tell of. Maybe you'd just as soon ask her, Rosemary, why she never returned my call?"

"I will, surely. I don't think she meant anything by it, Aunt Matilda. She might have been busy and forgotten about it. Anyhow, you'll have to come to see me now."

"Yes, I will. I've thought I'd put the minister's tintype up on the mantel now, as long as Ma ain't likely to see it. It'll be company for me. And I reckon I'll get me a cat. I always wanted one and Ma would never let me have it. I can keep it downstairs and she may never know about it, but even if she hears it meowing, or me talkin' to it, she can't say nothin' about it.

"My, ain't it beautiful!" she continued, as Rosemary slipped her white gown over her head. "Please let me hook it up, Rosemary—this is as near as I'll ever come to a wedding. Are you going in to see her before you go?"

Rosemary hesitated. "Yes," she sighed, "I'll go. I think I ought to."

"Don't if you don't want to. I would n't spoil my wedding-day by doing anything I did n't like to do."

Grandmother Relents

"I want to," murmured Rosemary. "I would n't feel right not to."

So, when she was ready, she went into the old lady's room. Happiness made her almost lovely as she stood there in her simple white gown and big plumed hat, drawing long white kid gloves over her red hands.

"Grandmother," she said, tremulously, "I 'm going up to the church now, to be married to Alden Marsh. Before I go, I want to tell you I 'm sorry if I 've ever done anything I should n't do, and ask you to forgive me for any unhappiness I may ever have caused you. I have n't meant to do it, and I—I believe you 've meant to be good to me. I hope you 're glad I 'm going to be happy now."

The stern old face relaxed, ever so little, the sharp eyes softened with mist, and by tremendous effort, Grandmother put out a withered, wavering hand. Rosemary bent over the bed, lifted her in her strong young arms, and kissed her twice, then hurried away.

Alden met them as they were half-way to the church, and, utterly regardless of two or three interested children who happened to be passing, shook hands with Aunt Matilda, then bent to kiss the flushed and happy face under the big plumed hat.

"What magnificence!" he said. "I 'm un-

The Ceremony

worthy of so much splendour, I 'm afraid. How on earth did you manage it?"

Rosemary glanced at Aunt Matilda, then laughed a little sadly. "Oh," she answered, with assumed lightness, "I—just managed it, that 's all."

At the door of the church Madame welcomed them with an armful of white roses for the bride. She, too, had a new gown in honour of the occasion, and her sweet old face was radiant with smiles. "What a lovely bride," she said, as she kissed Rosemary. "Oh, my dear! You must n't, truly! No tears on a wedding-day!"

The minister was waiting at the altar. Madame and Aunt Matilda sat down together in a front pew; there was a moment's solemn hush, then the beautiful service began.

Sunlight streamed through the open windows, carrying the colour and fragrance of Autumn into every nook and cranny of the church. From outside came the cheery piping of a robin that had paused upon a convenient window sill to peep in. There was a rush of tiny, furred feet through the drifted leaves, and a gleam of scarlet as a falling maple leaf floated past the open door. In the sunlight the taper lights on the altar gleamed like great stars suddenly come to earth.

"That ye may so live together in this life,"

Good-byes

the deep voice was saying, "and in the life everlasting. Amen!"

After the benediction, came the minister's perfunctory congratulations. When he called her "Mrs. Marsh," Rosemary instinctively looked toward Madame, then laughed and blushed when she understood. Madame took the girl into her arms as she came down from the altar. "Dear daughter!" she said. "Truly my daughter, now!"

Aunt Matilda and Rosemary hurried back to the little brown house, mindful of Alden's whispered admonition: "Don't keep me waiting long, dear—please." Neither spoke until after Rosemary had changed her gown, and stood before her mirror in pale lustrous grey, with hat and gloves to match.

"I 'll go in and say good-bye to Grandmother," Rosemary said.

"Wait a minute. She may be asleep."

Aunt Matilda tiptoed into the old lady's room, then came out again, with her finger on her lips. "She 's sound asleep," she said. "and her face looks as if she felt better. I guess she 'll come to herself again all right. The Starrs have always been healthy and hard to kill."

So the two went down-stairs quietly. When the door was opened, Rosemary saw that Alden was waiting for her at the gate. Smiling and with joy thrilling her to the utmost fibre

Into the World

of her being, Rosemary kissed Aunt Matilda good-bye, then ran out to where her bridegroom was waiting, to lead her into the world of service—and of love.

THE END

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